

THE PERFORMANCE OF MADNESS
IN KING LEAR

By

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To the Memory of my Mother,
Sara Jane Stanley
1933-1984

The Lord watch between me and thee
When we are absent one from another.
Amen.

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Abstract of Dissertation Presented to the Graduate School
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The mad scenes in King Lear comprise for Shakespeare a dramatic opportunity to produce extending and evolving spectacle which creates continual interpretive crises for the characters onstage as well as for the audience. This study examines the mad scenes in terms of the construction of verbal/visual spectacle and the concomitant hermeneutic struggle waged both onstage and off; it highlights the characters' appropriation of roles and performative personae, especially those of madness and folly; and it describes the play's exploitation of the tension between mimesis and metadrama. The analysis proceeds by the reconstructing of a theoretical performance which emphasizes a semiotics of stage emblems. The introduction "places" the study amongst other performance and metadramatic approaches to the play. Chapter 1 explicates Poor Tom's tour de force performance of madness in 3.4, with emphasis upon the warping of formal

representative modes to defamiliarize the figure. Chapter 2 analyzes the 4.6 scene, commencing with a discussion of the ritual and performative relationship between Edgar and Gloucester. It then provides a detailed account of Lear's appropriation of the performative modes of madness and folly in his own search for a strategically favorable role to assume. The conclusion describes the relationship between Lear and Cordelia late in the play primarily as a struggle to determine the genre of the play itself. It outlines Lear's metadramatic attempts to fabricate the miracle which will alter the nature of the play.

INTRODUCTION

This study provides what I hope will be useful groundwork for approaching the larger problem of theatrical representations of madness on the English Renaissance stage. Its theoretical aims are modest, since it offers a detailed scenic explication following the general procedures of performance and emblem criticism, but its topic is challenging--the two lengthiest mad scenes in King Lear, the 3.4 scene which features Poor Tom's tour de force performance, and the 4.6 scene, Lear's solo mad performance. These scenes are arduous to read or even to follow in a live or filmed production. However, I am assuming that the mature Shakespeare would not be content to portray madness as mere gibberish, but would both exploit its latent spectacle and fashion it for artistic ends. I shall engage in a detailed scenic examination which explores the composition of stage tableaux, the donning by characters of multiple personae for immediate performative ends, the use of props, gestures, and stage movement, and the exploiting of the tensions between mimetic and self-reflexive theater. Props and acting gestures and movement are to performance criticism what poetic imagery is to New Criticism--a fundamental source of argumentative evidence, the "existence" of which is rarely challenged. I assume I need not explain or justify my use of

such evidence. But these other considerations, stage tableaux or emblems, assumed personae and roles, and mimetic and metadramatic theater, might require clarification and hence merit a brief discussion before we turn to the exegetical body of this essay.

When Ann Pasternak Slater shows how Cleopatra thoroughly subverts prior hyperbolic poetic descriptions of her by the "palpable stage fact" of a violent gesture, she is arguing that the imagery of stage action can easily be more powerful in its effects than verbal imagery which is only declaimed.¹ When she argues that a vital topic in studying Shakespearean drama is "the emblematic significance of much of Shakespeare's stage action, and its crucial relationship to his verbal imagery,"² she is placing herself in a critical tradition which David Bevington observes is "now firmly established,"³ and which he traces from its inception in the 1950's, when it constituted a reaction against the New Critical privileging of poetic imagery over stage images, up to the early 1980's, when it could claim a burgeoning number of proponents. Slater is bolder in her claim that "in so far as stage action is concerned, the author's intentions are clear enough, though their further interpretation is another matter."⁴ In an era when critics shy away from appealing to the authority of authorial intent, such a claim (over the objections of textual critics) provides powerful justification for the kind of study she proposes. But Slater makes

another claim which is even more remarkable and provocative: "Shakespeare thinks in images, but their form depends on the moment."⁵ If she is right, her claim would ultimately support a semiotic, frame by frame analysis in which the verbal is but one among many communicative codes. For the purposes of the present study it provides a rationale for meticulously explicating certain scenes of King Lear in terms of the sequence of stage tableaux and verbal/visual emblems with which its ongoing spectacle is "constructed."

David Bevington, while acknowledging that "the universal language of emblems appeared in mottoes, coats of arms, mummings, street pageants, morality plays, Lord Mayor's shows, and sermons,"⁶ judiciously cautions us not to take emblematic and iconographic readings to an extreme. He offers an assessment of the playwrights' perception of their own craft which is entirely contrary to the "thinking in images" assertion of Ann Slater: "Elizabethan dramatists [speak] of their art as chiefly verbal, acceding to the view of Aristotle's Poetics that spectacle in drama is inferior to character and plot."⁷ If the dramatists plunder the icons and emblems available to them, they none the less insist upon differentiating their drama from the merely "symbolic and stereotypical" emblematic devices used in public pageantry and from the "visual sententiousness" of the staging devices of their immediate Tudor theatrical heritage.⁸ Instead, "Shakespeare gives substance to picture

by incorporating it in a mimetic fiction."⁹ If Bevington in his warning seems fundamentally at odds with semiotic or iconographic readings of drama (on the grounds that the dramatists did not perceive their work this way), his main concern seems to be to ward off the critical practice of imposing upon stage imagery the conventional and conservative meanings of emblems, a process which obscures Shakespeare's "own more iconoclastic vision."¹⁰ Bevington argues that Shakespeare "needs two visual vocabularies, one of order and one of holiday release,"¹¹ generating complexities and ambiguities in the interaction between the two systems. He is, in short, employing a careful definition of "emblem," which like "iconography," also often used by critics who analyze stage imagery, is used more loosely by critics such as Slater and James Siemon¹² and refers in general to striking visual tableaux and to complex combinations of word-images and physical objects or actions. Were I pressed to offer my own coined term for referring to stage imagery which combines the verbal and the visual, I might meekly suggest, "staged imagery."

While we will not debate here the merits of Bevington's assertion that the Elizabethan and Jacobean dramatists were primarily Aristotelian in outlook, we nevertheless should return to Bevington's fundamental objection to Slater's assumption about what the dramatists actually think they are doing. What is relevant to my study is the observation that

the scenes under consideration in this study, the mad scenes of Poor Tom and Lear, cannot be readily examined in terms of mimetic plot or character development. Not much "happens" in 3.4. There is a minor plot "frame" around the scene, Kent's failure to convince Lear to enter the hovel, and Gloucester's announced intent to lead them to shelter; and there is the plot motif of Edgar's return. As for character development, although we can say that Lear see-saws from passion to passion, interacts with a madman, and climactically "unbuttons" to join him, it is so laborious to describe line by line just how this happens that we suspect this progress to be obscure in performance and by no means privileged by Aristotelian assumptions. The plot in 4.6 is likewise minimal, especially during Lear's appearance, and while we may safely posit a significant development in Gloucester's character, once again Lear himself, the hero, remains extraordinarily inscrutable. I would argue that the main thing which "happens" in the mad scenes is that in 3.4 Poor Tom deliberately proffers provocative spectacle for Lear and for us to interpret, while in 4.6 Edgar, Gloucester, and Lear all produce complex spectacle which challenges our capacity to interpret. In terms of both plot and character (though these terms are not especially useful), the crisis in both scenes is a hermeneutic struggle, centered primarily among those onstage during 3.4, and among the audience itself in 4.6.

Where Bevington sets in opposition the emblematic

commonplace and the image from the world of holiday (viewing the theater itself as a liminal zone where the two codes interact) James Siemon takes a more Brechtian approach. To the conventional emblem he opposes stage images of iconoclasm which subvert the audience's capacity to respond conventionally. In King Lear this force is "so pervasive in its effect that it works to undermine audience complacency" so that the audience is continually shown the inadequacy of simplistic means of interpreting the events onstage.¹³ The characters likewise learn these painful lessons about their inability to interpret what happens to them. Siemon refers to "Lear's characteristically emblematic behavior,"¹⁴ "a mode of representation that can only call forth sympathy for one side."¹⁵ Lear experiences an epistemological crisis when his emblematic appropriation of the storm betrays him: "When the storm had seemed the emblem he desired, his every word had been aimed at inciting further violence from his universal opposite; [later] he speaks of the wet, the chattering teeth and agues. . . ."¹⁶ Siemon sees Gloucester's speech before jumping off the "cliff" as typical of his emblematic self-representation: "By ending his life, he can enclose it, can keep it this side of impiety."¹⁷ Instead, of course, Edgar radically undermines Gloucester's attempt at providing closure to his self-representation, deceiving him into enduring open-ended affliction. Thus Siemon describes a functional defamiliarization which continually confronts both characters and audience.

I believe that between these three critics whom I have briefly discussed I can triangulate my own approach in the present study. Like Slater, my own project is above all descriptive, an attempt to piece together the sequential creation of "staged imagery" as it occurs in two scenes from King Lear. Also like her, I employ no specialized vocabulary and proceed inductively to the extent that such is possible. But Slater works with the entire Shakespearean oeuvre with the intent of eventually describing a uniquely Shakespearean stage-language system. To complete her project she becomes evaluative of Shakespeare's theatrical technique (as I do not), disparaging the early and the later plays. Like Bevington, I am as yet unconvinced theoretically of the utility of explicating an entire play in terms of a sequence of stage images, though I maintain that such an approach is useful precisely in the kind of scenes I examine which are fundamentally built upon evolving spectacle. I do not adhere to his postulated "two visual vocabularies"--"vocabulary" implies more organization than I am yet willing to concede--but I do apply the order/inversion dichotomy only loosely and when convenient. Finally, like Siemon I am interested in the struggle among characters to represent events, but with two differences. First, I again do not describe what transpires in terms of a dichotomy ("emblem" versus "iconoclasm"), for I hold a more Foucauldian view, that discursive struggle is continuous and among multiple, shifting forces. And second,

I place more emphasis on how characters struggle to interpret events rather than specifically on how they represent them. This emphasis, I feel, permits me easier access to the problems which the audience also faces in interpreting events, an interest which I share with Siemon.

More than any of the above critics, however, I retain an interest in suggesting both multiple staging possibilities and the multiple levels of signification inherent in any given selected option. I am well aware that this creates what might politely be deemed a "slow-motion" effect of describing stage action, and I do not assume any live audience to be likely to perceive the proliferation of meanings generated by scholars, notorious for their subtlety. Marion Lomax in his emblem study describes the scholar's situation thusly:

In performance today, usually only one set of ideas is selected to be expressed and developed as there is little time for an audience to appreciate multiple branches of meaning which might have been more obvious in former times. A reader, on the other hand, has the opportunity to consider all the possible ramifications simultaneously in relation to various interlocking traditions and ideas--and if they may no longer be expressed simultaneously on stage, then, at least, there may still be an awareness of the possible complexity of many dramatic moments. [18]

I routinely describe a number of possibilities, choosing and not choosing, continually considering the perceptions of that theoretical audience (whom I deem "we") of scholars who reconstruct and imagine performances as they might occur on a Jacobean stage.

There are two sets of terms which I frequently employ in describing performance situations. The first pair is "role" and "persona." Thomas F. Van Laan discerns four types of role in use upon the Shakespearean stage: the literal (e.g., Bottom playing Pyramus); the appropriated alien identity (Caius and Poor Tom); the dramatic (avenger, prodigal, intriguer, villain, clown); and the role conferred by the mimetic social structure (King, subject, father, son).¹⁹ I distinguish persona from role largely in terms of the duration of its manifestation. I use persona to refer to a character's brief appropriation of an alternative voice and style of enactment for some immediate histrionic or dramatic end. My thinking here is influenced by the work of Erving Goffman, who maintains that social interaction is fundamentally theatrical, with all participants routinely adopting and discarding "roles" as the exchange situation defines or requires them.²⁹ This notion of a radical fluidity in self-representation underpins my definition of "persona." A simple example is the Fool's brief adoption of the persona of a cockney kitchen wench when he shrieks, "Down wantons, down!" (2.4.122), for the immediate purpose of making a joke by which to distract Lear. More complex is Edgar who in the role of Poor Tom adopts numerous personae, most frequently those of the beggar, the demoniac, and the antic Bedlamite, the purposes of which we examine in detail below. Most complex is Lear, who after abdication and then banishment

finds himself without a role to play. He thus experiments with many personae (the avenger, the stoic, the martyr, the madman), all inscribed within the roleless role of "discarded father," the role he detests and seeks to escape via these experiments with personae.

The other pair of terms is "ritual" and "metadrama." The relationship between these theatrical forms is itself in need of a full-length study, but my distinction between the two will be fairly simple. While both theatrical modes foreground artifice, ritual employs ceremony as a means of effecting (and regulating) a significant change in the relationships among characters, and thus it is amenable to some kind of structuralist description (which in the present essay remains thoroughly informal and non-technical).²¹ Metadrama foregrounds theatrical artifice solely to produce the effect of self-reflexivity.²² Ritual resolves a theatrical problem; metadrama creates one: the problem of interpretation. For metadrama radically involves the audience, suddenly distancing us from the mimetic situation (I deem "mimesis" to be roughly equivalent to our modern conception of naturalism in dramatic enactment), and making us aware of our role in shaping events inasmuch as it challenges us to make use of the power of our own response.

Because of the centrality of performances of madness to the present study, we should make a few observations on the theatrical representation of madness. In real life, madness does not interact with sanity in terms of normal dialectic

for the simple reason that the madman and the sane man do not speak the same language. Madness does employ a code in order to express the speaker's extremity, a code which calls forth culturally recognized emblems of death, terror, loathing, helplessness, mockery, etc.²³ But given its disrupted capacity for articulation, madness must both compose and amplify its message by means of histrionics, which through regulative pressure from the sane resolve into representational conventions.²⁴ In the English Renaissance theater, madness is represented, not self-represented. It may be interpreted for us by an onstage commentator who provides enough of the madman's biographical history so that we perceive the performance in terms of cause (former way of life) and effect (present mad condition and behavior).²⁵ Or, I assume, the mad speech may be so contextualized that we perceive it as comic, pathetic, or terrifying and are content to experience a prescribed emotional response so that we do not demand or expect to comprehend any ambiguities or cryptic or tortuous passages in the speech. Or the speech may be presented as overt gibberish or absurd argumentation or be spectacularly provocative for the purpose of confronting us, defamiliarizing the dramatic moment and challenging us to exercise our interpretive capacities. I assume madness in King Lear to be represented simultaneously in all of these ways, producing exhilarating theatrical spectacle and inducing in us an ongoing interpretive crisis.

The most significant influences on my conception of madness are the work of Keith Thomas, Michel Foucault, and Michael MacDonald; I am also acquainted with studies of Renaissance humoral psychology, but seldom employ their concepts.²⁶ My thinking about folly is most influenced by Erasmus's The Praise of Folly, and by the work of Enid Welsford and C.L. Barber.²⁷ In the present work I distinguish between madness and folly in only a simplistic and functional way, madness being more malefic, self-abusive, and generally uncontrolled than folly. I discuss the relationship between the two in more detail in the conclusion, and at that time primarily in terms of the performative modes distinctive to each, and of the hybrid role which Lear assembles from the repertoire they provide.

I ought briefly to acknowledge the influence of Michel Foucault which the reader will discern in this essay. His famous Madness and Civilization has stimulated my thinking about the radical discursive subjugation of the mad by the sane which Foucault claims commenced on a broad front in the 17th century. I must admit that a recent reading of Michael MacDonald's study Mystical Bedlam has tempered my perception of the extent and forms of discursive repression by the sane of the mad, at least for the period when King Lear was written. Nevertheless, my interest in the interpretive crisis which unrestrained mad performance provokes remains excited by Foucault's contentions. I also give some consid-

eration to the semiotics of punishment and torture, for which I am indebted to Foucault's Discipline and Punish. Finally, I employ at one point the notion of juridico-legal discourse, which Foucault describes in Volume 1 of The History of Sexuality.²⁸

Citations from King Lear come from the New Arden edition²⁹ edited by Kenneth Muir; I make free use of his annotations. I do often analyze variants between the two texts of the play, the Pied Bull Quarto (Q1) of 1608, and the Folio (F1) of 1623. For convenience I continue to use the line numbers from the conflated Muir edition when referring to a variant from either text. I am omitting a bibliographic review of the scholarship on King Lear for several reasons, chief of which is that bibliographic reviews for the play are so numerous that another here would provide no significant service to the reader.³⁰

NOTES

1. Ann Pasternak Slater, Shakespeare the Director (Sussex: Harvester, 1982) 1.
2. Slater 3.
3. David Bevington, Action is Eloquence: Shakespeare's Language of Gesture (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1984) 7.
4. Slater 5.
5. Slater 6.
6. Bevington 9.
7. Bevington 9.
8. Bevington 10.

9. Bevington 10.
10. Bevington 10.
11. Bevington 5.
12. James Siemon, Shakespearean Iconoclasm (Berkeley: U of California P, 1985).
13. Siemon 251.
14. Siemon 253.
15. Siemon 254.
16. Siemon 255-56.
17. Siemon 270.
18. Marion Lomax, Stage Images and Traditions: Shakespeare to Ford (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1987) 5-6.
19. Thomas F. Van Laan, Role-Playing in Shakespeare (Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1978) chapter 1.
20. Erving Goffman, The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life (New York: Doubleday, 1959).
21. See, for example, Arnold van Gennep, The Rites of Passage, trans. Monika B. Vizedom and Gabrielle L. Caffee (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1960); Victor Turner, The Anthropology of Performance (New York: PAJ, 1986); and applied to Shakespeare in C.L. Barber, Shakespeare's Festive Comedy (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1959).
22. My thinking on metadrama is deeply indebted to the work of James L. Calderwood, especially Shakespearean Metadrama (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1971) and To Be and Not to Be: Negation and Metadrama in "Hamlet" (New York: Columbia UP, 1983); and I also am indebted to the classroom teaching of Sidney R. Homan, who introduced me to this critical approach.
23. See Michael MacDonald, Mystical Bedlam (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1981) chapter 4.
24. See Michel Foucault, Madness and Civilization, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Random House, 1965).
25. See Robert R. Reed, Bedlam on the Jacobean Stage (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1952).

26. Keith Thomas, Religion and the Decline of Magic (New York: Scribner, 1971); Michel Foucault, see n.24; Michael MacDonald, see n.23; Lawrence Babb, Elizabethan Malady (East Lansing: Michigan State College P, 1951); and J.M. Bamborough, The Little World of Man (New York: Longman, Green, 1952).

27. Desiderius Erasmus, The Praise of Folly, trans. Clarence Miller (New Haven: Yale UP, 1979); Enid Welsford, The Fool (London: Faber and Faber, 1935); C.L. Barber, see n.21.

28. Michel Foucault, Madness and Civilization (see n.24); Foucault, Discipline and Punish, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Random House, 1979); Foucault, The History of Sexuality, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Random House, 1980).

29. William Shakespeare, King Lear, ed. Kenneth Muir (1952; London: Methuen, 1972).

30. One of the best brief surveys is in Sidney Homan, Shakespeare's Theater of Presence (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell UP, 1987). See also Stephen Booth, "King Lear," "Macbeth," Indefinition, and Tragedy (New Haven: Yale UP, 1983) 3-57; and Nicholas Brooke, "The Ending of "King Lear," in Shakespeare 1564-1964, ed. Edward Bloom (Providence: Providence College P, 1964) 71-87.

CHAPTER 1 MADNESS PERFORMED

The fundamental concern in this chapter is with the theatrical representation of Poor Tom and his performative interaction with his onstage audience and with "us," the audience offstage. It also attempts to describe the process by which Lear opts to emulate Tom performatively. The study proceeds on the assumption that Poor Tom both as a spectacular visual object and as a performer communicates to both of his audiences continually and insistently on multiple levels. Not only can Tom be "placed" within divergent theatrical traditions, but "we" in the audience, based on various individual experiences, maintain a wide variety of theoretical positions upon the issues of madness and its causes and manifestations, and upon pneumatology, demonology, and possession. Thus the appearance and performances of Poor Tom will generate among us (as well as those onstage) a wide variety of ever-shifting expectations and responses. It is therefore not the purpose of this performance study to examine at length the literary and social sources and analogues of Poor Tom. We shall provide only the briefest of sketches of certain of these considerations to suggest the broad parameters of convention and expectation which apply to Poor Tom's performance and which permit and even foster Tom's multiple "signification" and our diverse responses.

Mad characters on the English Renaissance stage could be comic, terrifying, pathetic, or some combination of these. Robert Reed surveys that era's stage conventions of representing madness, in particular of Bedlamites.¹ These were confined lunatics who were portrayed as types, such as mad bawds, scholars, or merchant adventurers, and who served in their brief stage appearances as butts of satire, testimonially attributing their madness to vices associated with their profession or social class, and parodying language and gestures specific to that class. The only other actual Bedlam beggar besides Poor Tom in the drama is Diccon in Gammer Gurton's Needle (1552-1563), but Diccon is not a madman, simply a merry mischievous prankster in the tradition of the Roman comedy slave or the Vice. Together with the frequent and imprecise attributions of madness to stage clowns and fools, we see that madmen, especially Bedlamites, could be comic. But other traditions of representing madmen produced entirely different results. There was the Senecan tradition of mad fury, in which the madman expressed high passions in declamatory speeches and in gruesome and spectacular acts.² This representation of madness tended to produce thrilling terror and pathos. Another tradition, originating in the medieval miracle plays, was that of the Mad Sinner, a tradition admirably traced by Penelope Doob, who shows that staged madness was always depicted as retribution for sin, at best a trial used to purify a saint, but more often divine judgment heralding damnation.³ Often such depictions would,

like the Senecan, produce terror and pathos, but in the well-known ranting figure of Herod, we find the hybrid which A.P. Rossiter calls the grotesque--that which elicits the exhilarating response of simultaneous terror and laughter.⁴ I assume all of these traditions to be at work in King Lear. For Lear himself is at various times a hercules furens, a tormented sinner, a lamenting wretch, a comedian, and continually, even outside the recognized "mad scenes," is flirting with madness in various forms and manifestations. I contend that we do not gain a great deal by attempting to constrain Poor Tom to any particular category of represented madness because his mad performance continually draws from among them all.

Much of Poor Tom's enactment of madness is as a demoniac. We know that Shakespeare borrowed much of his vocabulary for demonianism from Samuel Harsnett's satiric diatribe against staged exorcisms conducted by seditious⁵ Jesuits. But we cannot determine whether Poor Tom's enactment is necessarily performed as a parody of a demoniac, for as Stephen Greenblatt points out, a serious portrayal of a demoniac might constitute Shakespeare's rebuttal to Harsnett, who waxes resolutely anti-theatrical in one segment of his treatise.⁶ I presume that a good actor could to some extent straddle the line--which is very thin anyway-- between a burlesque and a "straight" presentation of a demoniac, and would wish to exploit this ambiguity as a resource by which

to elicit a variety of responses as the dramatic situation requires. Yet we should note that for the characters in King Lear the question of whether Poor Tom is a genuine demoniac or a fraudulent rogue is never a significant issue. There is but one passing reference made by Cornwall's servants in 3.7: "his [the Bedlam's] roguish madness allows itself to anything" (3.7.102-03; Q1 only). The point the servant makes is that as a Bedlam Poor Tom could serve as Gloucester's guide without being held culpable as a traitor; the servants clearly understand the strategic advantages of such a guise. But none of Poor Tom's actual interlocutors ever "tests" or even questions the genuineness of his demonianism or his madness, with the possible and subtle exception of the Fool, who seems to see in Tom a fellow fool and comic performer. The other characters are altogether silent on the subject of fiends and demon-possession, evincing neither skepticism nor credulity, at least during Tom's 3.4 performance, his most significant. Perhaps this simply means that his performance is so authentic that they are convinced that he is utterly mad. But this is the point: later, Lear (3.6) and Gloucester (4.6) do evince belief in the fiend and in persecution by the fiend. Poor Tom at the very least provides the two fathers a vocabulary by which to express their suffering and despair. I assume that demonianism in the play is represented in complex enough fashion to harbor the diverse interpretations among the offstage audience, and to elicit from us similarly various emotional responses.

Before we proceed to Poor Tom's performance and the interpretations and responses which it evokes, we first must consider his bizarre physical appearance which, like the amalgam of social and literary contexts that ambiguates him, renders him an interpretive enigma but at the same time presents provocative spectacle which insists that we respond. We shall consider a number of costuming possibilities, from among which one might carefully select elements with which to fashion a pattern, to construct a Poor Tom in keeping with one's character or thematic preferences. I too shall make choices, but I hope to constrain Tom less, to allow for more numerous and hence more ambiguous representational possibilities, because I am considering madness not as a theme nor as a character-illuminating device, but as a dramatic function, specifically that of alienation or defamiliarization. I shall be describing madness primarily in terms of the capacity of its representations and dramatic interactions to perplex and challenge its audiences onstage and off, simultaneously provoking contradictory expectations and responses, compelling its audiences to recontextualize their own perceptions. Thus Poor Tom as a theatrical figure might be fundamentally uninterpretable: attired, introduced, and enacted so as to shock, startle, and bewilder his audiences onstage and off.

Poor Tom's attire in 3.4, whatever its specific arrangements, constitutes what Edgar calls "presented nakedness"

(2.3.11), the not-often attempted Renaissance public-stage representation of nakedness. Presumably Tom's only garment is a ragged blanket girding his loins and perhaps in addition draped over one shoulder to make a toga. So Poor Tom is likely barefooted, barelegged, bare armed, bareheaded, and at least partially bare shouldered, which for a theater renowned for sumptuous costuming makes for a considerable quantity of exposed flesh, enough certainly to startle us, and enough to illustrate vividly an appropriate retribution for the Servingman's confessed "sins of the flesh." As a representation of nakedness it is temporarily convincing, until the blanket itself is challenged by the Fool. The most comprehensive impression which this represented nakedness conveys is probably that of sheer exposure and vulnerability. But Tom is vulnerable not only to the elements and to his fellows onstage (whom he perceives as potential tormenters) but to us his offstage audience as well, vulnerable in that it is entirely possible that he cannot control or even predict our interpretations of him or our responses to him. The strongest reflex which impels us to perceive Tom as an abject object of pathos is entirely suspended during the comic reactions of the Fool, beginning with his unceremonious departure from the hovel, and culminating in "Nay, he reserved a blanket, else we had been all shamed" (3.4.64-65), a quip with potential for inviting voluble, mimesis-subverting feedback from the more raucous spectators among

us. The Fool's ironic modesty exploits all of the audience tension generated by the sudden appearance of the shocking figure, from the embarrassment of the prim to the curiosity of the voyeuristic, who wonder (perhaps aloud) if Tom is wearing anything underneath. On the other hand, if we persist in seeing Tom as a comic character--full of song, dance, and delightful antic behavior; a butt or a vehicle for satire; a bawdy and impious joker--then we encounter serious perplexities in the consistently sober and sympathetic on-stage responses he receives, in the extended suspense over Lear's deterioration and the Bedlam's impact upon it, and in the "knowledge" that this is Edgar. We have trouble balancing our amusement at Tom with our sympathy for the mimetic plight of Edgar. Given that Tom evokes in us such divergent and conflicting impressions and responses, we should not be surprised if Edgar himself also expresses bewilderment at the figure he portrays, not knowing quite how to interpret him either, and perhaps evincing difficulty "wielding" this bizarre persona.

Tom's nakedness alone is provocative, simultaneously audacious and vulnerable on both performative and mimetic levels. But the naked man is in fact strategically accoutered and our responses are hence further complicated. Critics who wish to reconstruct Poor Tom's appearance are fortunate to have Edgar's detailed account in the 2.3 soliloquy. Edgar tells us that he plans to "grime with filth" his face (9). This

begriming might be done so as to resemble the Blackface of the mumming tradition, a comic figure. And yet if his face is entirely blackened in a black grease-paint mask, it also suggests the stage Moor, with his traditional connotations of damned soul and villain. Otherwise, Tom's face could be swathed with clearly discernable strokes of "grime" which, in concert with other features, conveys a madman's self-desecration, an "anal playing" with muck and face. Or perhaps Tom is symmetrically, "ritually" begrimed so as to suggest savagery, the Wild Man of the Woods tradition of romance. Or finally, he could be "randomly" begrimed to convey the filth and squalor accumulated in his wretched fugitive existence. Each of these possibilities for composing this feature of Poor Tom's costume elicits a different "reading" of Tom's face, and yet any specific rendering of Tom's facial make-up cannot be said to prescribe our reading of it. For a single example, the randomly begrimed face might suggest savagery to one audience member, self-abuse to another, and manic playing to a third. Any presentation of Poor Tom's face will create a graphic and provocative signifier with no clear referent, or with several at once, and will arouse no definitively predictable response: comic, frightening, pathetic, disgusting, exotic? Tom's face itself, prior to the actor's expressions, prompts us to a continual interpretive effort.

Of the three figures onstage at the time of Tom's first

entrance, the coxcombed Fool and the unbonneted Lear already create a stage tableau of ostended headgear. Edgar tells us that he intends to "elf all my hairs in knots" (3.2.10), from which we infer that Poor Tom is likely wearing a wig of long, filthy, greasy hair twisted and perhaps tied into snarls, the image of which may later suggest to Edgar a component in his description to Gloucester of the tempting fiend who had "Horns whelked and waved like the enridged sea" (4.6.71). This detail of the hair seems to be absent from contemporary accounts of the Abraham man, and may be an addition to render the figure more frightening. Gamini Salgado deems the Bedlam beggars "among the most fearsome wanderers on the Elizabethan roads,"⁷ though he draws this conclusion largely on the strength of citations from King Lear.⁸ The wig may work in conjunction with the black face to convey the wickedness of a Moor, or to connote savagery, or self-abuse. Or the hair may, for those who believe in the literal origins of elf-locks, comprise evidence of Tom's having had contact with evil spirits. However, we might perceive the locks as more benign, as being exotic or simply ludicrous. We must bear in mind that the wig as a prop is by nature a sliding signifier, susceptible to actorial manipulation which recontextualizes it. In a fit of frenzy Tom might pull at his hair, or pull off some of it, but he could also pull his locks until they stick straight out, as a way of miming terror. He could shake his head such that the

locks appear snake-like or scourge-like. But in the Serving-man speech, when he confesses that he "curled my hair, wore gloves in my cap" (83-84), he might well accompany the line with gestures of primping, even twisting a lock into resembling some fashionable courtier curl. The hair, if it conveys a distinct initial impression, can nevertheless be wielded so as to surprise us.

Tom also has "mortified bare arms," lanced with "pins, wooden pricks, nails, sprigs of rosemary" (2.3.15-16). These self-mutilated arms seem, of all the components to the costume, the one feature functioning with most specificity to signify demon-possession or else dangerous insanity. This is the one feature of Poor Tom's condition not conceivably explained as the result of physical duress alone. The actor can make them appear the source of recurrent pain, of torment by the fiend, of reduction to pathetic defenselessness. Conversely, Poor Tom might seem altogether oblivious to them, which suggests an insensitivity to pain that renders him all the more fearful. Assuming the make-up job to be realistic, the effect could be shocking, pathetic, fearful, even stupefying, a fascinating feature to which Lear's attention, verbally and non-verbally, often returns. A line like "through the sharp hawthorn blows the cold wind" (3.4.45-46) has the potential to be chilling, to induce the very shivering it describes, for with a little histrionic persuasion the poetic image may be imposed upon what we see--the arms--

compelling a perceptual transformation and controlling our emotional response. These mutilated arms, we shall see, will again be the object of enforced visual transformation, of interpretive struggle, of grim mediation between opposing wills.

The only other props which might be construed to have textual support are a drinking horn, which Tom uses for receiving charity and for miming in several songs and routines, and a staff, presumably what Edgar calls the "ballows" with which he cracks Oswald's skull late in 4.6 (cf. Awdeley's mention of "a stick with bacon on it").⁹ The drinking horn seems utterly harmless and is more in keeping with the tradition of Poor Tom's "playing the fool at fairs and markets" (as when he plays the "jolly shepherd" song in 3.6) than with his "offering a fearsome aspect at a cottage or a farmhouse door."¹⁰ The staff could function at a given moment as a horse, a fool's bauble, or a potential weapon, but it might seem more proper to a tramp than to a fugitive and thus be somewhat disjointed in relation to Edgar's mimetic situation. All of these costume elements taken together produce a highly complex spectacle which produces a proliferating array of impressions. The most fearsome version of Poor Tom still carries a drinking horn, and the fact that upon his entrance it is the Fool who fears him (Kent does not) immediately undermines his capacity to produce terror. The most comic version of Poor Tom, the merry

rogue of the road, cannot conceal the horror of the mutilated arms. Poor Tom is, by Rossiter's definition, grotesque, an uneasy combination of the comic and the terrifying, and thus is radically ambiguous and unpredictable, fluid in his ability suddenly to reveal either face of grotesquerie.

Turning now to the scene of Poor Tom's debut, his tour de force performance of madness in act 3 scene 4, we must recapitulate the significant events of the scene up to the point of Tom's entrance so as to establish the context of his bursting into the action. Prior to Tom's entrance the major focus of the scene is Lear, and we need to describe his situation prefatory to the introduction of madness. The onstage interaction which comprises the early part of 3.4 consists of Kent's persistent pleading with Lear to take shelter in the "hovel." Kent in each of his first four lines in the scene says either "enter" or "enter here." In 3.2 Kent informs Lear (and thus us) that "hard by here is a hovel" (1.61), from which we infer that upon entering in 3.4, Kent traverses the stage until he "finds" this place he had spotted, and then he leads Lear to it and tries persuading him to enter. The hovel is probably represented one of two ways. It may simply be located at the stage door opposite the one the trio uses to enter. Michael Hattaway asserts that contemporary scholarly opinion is decidedly inclined against the once-popular theory that the public theaters had an "inner stage," an opening in the backstage wall between

the two tiring house doors which was curtained and served as a recessed acting area for special scenes.¹¹ An inner acting area was more likely formed by opening either set of double-doors outward (i.e., toward downstage) and fitting a curtain rod atop the doors to form a small curtained recess. Such an arrangement for the hovel has the advantage of focusing our vision upon that mysterious veil such that the effect of surprise of the Fool's and Tom's subsequent explosive entrance is heightened, especially if Kent often seductively pulls back half the curtain as he entreats Lear to enter, and if we can hear the Fool scurrying or scuffling behind the curtain before we see him. A variation on this first alternative is to have the one set of stage doors standing wide open and, particularly if the tiring house or backstage area is dark, this opening proves all the more mysterious, seeming more cave-like and savage and so a fit place to house a madman. The other most plausible way to represent the hovel is to employ one of the portable lath and plaster "houses" occasionally used onstage, used most frequently to represent a tent or military camp; in fact, such a house, fitted with the appropriate banner, could serve later as the French camp in 4.4 and 4.7 and the British in 5.1. Among its advantages, the house is highly conducive to the effect of surprise as Tom bursts out like a jack in the box.

The stage tableaux at the outset of the scene are organized around either of two basic configurations of the

characters and the hovel toward which they are drawn. The first places Kent on one side of the hovel and Lear on the other, and the ensuing tug of war of wills across the hovel entrance serves to highlight the hovel and its promise of refuge or mystery. The Fool, silent during these initial exchanges of dialogue, reiterates his advice to obtain shelter if he literally "sides" with Kent, or else declares his loyalty to Lear if he remains on Lear's side of the hovel entrance. Centering the hovel in this manner provides a frame for the Fool's comic irruption which, if from a curtained recess, affords the opportunity to parody the well-known routine of the Clown's sticking his head out between curtains and making faces--which the Fool might do while calling for help--and this framing of the hovel also furnishes Poor Tom a "split" audience onstage, to whom he can perform contrapuntally. If the hovel recess is open and dark within, Kent entreats Lear as if across an abyss, a grave, a sulphurous pit, an emblem repeated elsewhere in the play. And because the Fool later when bursting out of the hovel needs time to deliver his lines (39-40) before he reaches the protection of Kent, we might even see Tom chase the Fool within the darkness of the hovel, back and forth across the entrance, teasing us with a glimpse of the spectacular madman about to emerge. Overall, however, this tableau, though perfectly feasible on a proscenium stage or even the shallow stage of the Jacobean private theater, presents a serious disadvantage

on the deep thrust stage of the public theater in that the visual symmetry of the figures flanking the hovel is difficult to perceive for the audience off of stage right or left. Furthermore, on a deep thrust stage we probably do not want extended action occurring far upstage, which would rule out using the doors in favor of the more mobile house. Flanking the house undoubtedly heightens our curiosity about its contents.

The other tableau is created by having Kent physically mediate between Lear and the hovel, with the hovel perhaps stage right, Kent left and downstage of it, and Lear left and downstage of Kent. This creates a nice line, more universally perceptible around a thrust stage, which highlights Lear's response as Kent attempts to "pull him" (gesturally) toward the hovel. Kent's refrain "enter" and especially "enter here" suggests that he remains in proximity to the hovel as though he were tied to it. This creates the possibility that Lear wanders downstage from Kent to act out his internal conflict, while Kent remains upstage calling to him, a tableau emphasizing Lear's growing isolation. But it seems out of character for Kent not to pursue his master and attempt to be a more active guide. If we like giving Lear some "private" downstage space and yet wish to keep him reasonably close to Kent (with whom, we recall, he remains for a time in dialogue) we might prefer on a deep thrust stage to use the house, placed near center right. In general, this tab-

leau privileges Lear's relation to the audience and his reaction to Poor Tom's appearance, and also permits Lear to invite Tom downstage, as though into the light of scrutiny, which the lunatic detests. It also facilitates the traversal of longer distances onstage, which is advantageous for Tom's performance. Either option for representing the hovel provides a focal point both for the contention of wills between Lear and Kent and for Tom's explosive entrance.

We need now to describe the dramatic and discursive contexts into which Poor Tom irrupts. Kent's opening entreaty to Lear to take shelter is punctuated with another terrific burst of thunder, a cannonball dropped on a metal trough in the stage Heaven. This ambiguous burst both supports the cogency of Kent's suggestion and yet declares the impossibility of its fulfillment, for the tempest, of course, is partially in Lear's mind and is the very force which so utterly isolates him: "Let me alone" (3). Lear already displays two traits in common with Poor Tom, the desire to be left alone, which exacerbates his chronic alienation, and the compulsion to perform, to act out the dialogue of passions which bandy him about, jerking him like a puppet. This tendency toward "performed alienation" permits a double battle of the wills: between Lear and Kent, and also between Lear's projected personae, which illustrate his internal struggle. But Kent, whose response to Lear in his madness is always common-sensical and well-intended but usually

ineffective and ill-timed, succeeds in calling only our attention to the novel, not Lear's, and inadvertently provokes Lear into a tirade in which he describes and then enacts his inner division. In this speech (6-22) Lear expresses his inner turmoil in terms of the contention between a greater and a lesser malady, an inner and an outer storm, an assailing bear and a roaring sea, and makes the point that one always endures a lesser destructive force while grappling with a greater.

But this dichotomized struggle is soon expressed by means of a striking antiphonal self-dramatization. Three times Lear asks--himself? Kent? us?--a question delivered as though with choric authority, and three times he replies as an entirely different persona, as though he seeks a viable new role for himself. His first question expresses choral outrage: "Is't not as this mouth should tear this hand / For lifting food to't?" (15-16), to which he replies with a different voice, posture, gestures--as a new persona--that of the avenger: "But I will punish home" (16). As though the chorus has called his attention to a crime, like an awaking deity he now is both offended sovereign, retaliating with grim and invincible vengeance upon the rebels, and returning father, punishing his wicked children. Lear's enactment of this dialogic exchange between personae is exaggerated and histrionic, a minidrama either performed explicitly for Kent (though he delivers Kent's lines for him, since Kent only

sporadically bleats to this quixotic avenger to crawl into a nearby hole), or performed oblivious to those onstage, to an imagined or offstage audience of witnesses. Lear then reverts to the role of powerless exile and helpless victim, asking a question which is more an expression of incredulous self-pity than a supplication for justice: "In such a night / To shut me out?" (17-18). Once again this persona gives way before a new one: "Pour on; I will endure" (18). This is not the vengeful authority figure but a defiant exile, almost a rebel against tyrannical authority, certainly a stoic with limitless reserves of internal strength for resistance. But this posturing also subsides, and for a third time Lear becomes the interrogator, but his question this time is not choric, not delivered as though for an audience of witnesses: "In such a night as this?" (19). He is now the humiliated father, an incredulous suppliant directly addressing his daughters, without the intermediary of an audience before whom to transform himself. Losing the fluidity permitting him to change roles, Lear loses his only defense against the daughters, causing him to panic: "O! that way madness lies" (20). But ironically, it is this very madness which will provide him his most radical capacity for creating and experimenting with new roles; mad language will permit him to assume new voices by which to posit his identity. And in these rehearsals of new voices Lear has opened a discursive breach for that proliferation of voices which madness

itself produces, disembodied voices seeking a host (like fiends), a malleable body to possess and metamorphose.

Lear abandons the roaring sea in his mind to return to the mouth of the bear--his onstage companions--fleeing the greater malady of his treacherous family for the lesser malady of the kingdom: his subjects whom he has betrayed (it was upon the presumed loyalty of his family that Lear ventured to betray his kingdom). His refuge now is in his renewed awareness of the physical exposure which binds him to his disenfranchised subjects and, willing to alleviate their suffering and thereby his own guilt, he shepherds his people together to usher them into the hovel away from the way that madness lies, unaware that it lurks in the hovel whither he tends. He directs his and our attention toward this hovel, employing the command "in" four times in five lines. This hovel appears a tranquil place of shelter, of sleep, even of hibernation, and we, like Kent, who remains vigilantly posted outside the hovel, desire that oppressed nature sleep. But Lear is not yet ready for this simple oblivion, not until he formally negates himself in the famous prayer in which his production of new voices continues, though in a different way.

The prayer (28-36) commences with a third-person address to "Poor naked wretches," which then becomes a second-person address (the formal "you") expressing pity to the oppressed. At the center of the prayer is that ubiquitous exclamation of

recognition--"O!"--which initiates a first-person confession: "I have ta'en too little care of this" (32-33). The second half of the prayer resumes in the third-person in the address to "Pomp," and as in the first half, it continues in second-person direct address, though in the informal "thou." In effect, the first-person voice at the center of the prayer, what might be called the voice of conscience, the enacted agenbite of inwit ("O!"), arbitrates between two parties, the poor wretches and the callous monarch. We have, then, a self-dramatized trial scene in which the conscience hears the cries of the wretched and then passes sentence upon Pomp: "Expose thyself to feel what wretches feel." Interestingly, there is no restitution offered to the dispossessed, only the command that the monarch himself share their misery. Exposing himself to "this pitiless storm," Pomp is able to "shake the superflux" to the wretched, the superflux being not superfluous wealth but the rain from off his own back. In one sense Lear describes what he is doing at that very moment, standing vigil over the hovel wherein the Fool warms himself, and where Kent would also be had he obeyed Lear's request to go in himself. Lear thus fulfills his self-imposed duty to defend the wretched from seasons such as these.

This new persona of penitent defender of the dispossessed is Lear's second and more ceremonious attempt at forging a new role, and yet the persona never resolves into a

characteristic voice with identifiable features, but remains a hypothetical role rhetorically self-conferred. And therein lies its essential hollowness, for his penitence is achieved only by verbal fiat. His speech to his poor naked brethren is clothed in gorgeous rhetoric, unlike the bare prose of his later "unbuttoning" speech, toward which both Lear and this essay tend. Lear is still holding back from "that way" where madness lies, this time in his attempted transmutation of his daughters' punishment into a noble ritual of self-sacrifice. In his previous histrionic dialogue between his fabricated chorus and his experimental personae (the avenger, the stoic, and the betrayed exile), Lear was unable to mediate successfully between the factious voices, escaping the most feared one only by returning to the lesser malady, the real people around him. The actor's subtext seems to be, "Since my self-pitying chorus could not lead me away from madness, perhaps the chorus of conscience can." And so there he stands, shivering outside the hovel and shaking off the superflux-- enough, ironically, to flood out the wretches in the hovel. "Fathom and half! fathom and half! Poor Tom!" (37). A poor wretch appears who will speak for himself, and with whom Lear will negotiate, though less ceremoniously and without the protection of the voice of conscience.

As Poor Tom enters, then, Lear has just aborted his initial diffident attempts at mimicking and assuming foreign voices, and has fallen back, impelled by panic, into his

characteristic mode of formal orchestration--flawed since the opening scene--of arbitration and judgment. This formality, of course, is abruptly interrupted. Poor Tom's entrance in 3.4 is comic, if only because it is startling. Theobald's emended stage direction, "Enter Edgar disguised as a madman," is plausible for Q1 and has Tom enter upon Kent's command to "Come forth" (44). However, F1's direction reads "Enter Edgar and Foole" and occurs earlier, immediately upon the conclusion of Lear's prayer to poor naked wretches (36). The F1 entrance gives us a moment to "take in" Tom and share in the Fool's comic reaction to him, so that perhaps the Fool detracts less both from Tom's first significant acts of self-representation and from Lear's initial reaction to the Bedlamite. The Theobald emendation suggests that when the Fool stumbles upon Tom in the hovel, both are terrified, with Tom shouting "Fathom and half!" (F1 only) as though he were drowning and yet, paradoxically, afraid to come out.

But according to the F1 direction both characters enter, so presumably Tom chases the Fool out onto the stage, stopping at the perimeter (if the hovel is located at an entrance door) or else at the entrance to the house, frozen in a crouch and reluctant to be visible to us. To have Tom visibly present punctuates Lear's prayer all the more forcefully, and helps the Fool deliver his comic response more effectively since his flight from a visible object both focuses the comic point of his reaction and establishes his

potential for future startling and amusing reactions to Tom. The Fool's comic response also might "deflect" our own inclination to laugh at this bizarre apparition. But his repeated claim that Tom is "a spirit" quite possibly complicates the initial impression which Tom creates. On the one hand, it could increase the comic effect of the Fool's terrified misprision, conveying as well a hint of Harsnett's satiric narration as it introduces the vaudevillian demoniac. On the other hand, it could undermine a comic response if this apparition looks as though it "were better in a grave." After all, the moment that Tom appears, before he begins his routine of whining, lamenting, and begging which clarifies (for both audiences) his motives, is a moment of considerable disorientation for us, our confusion being intensified by the distribution onstage of diverse reactions to Tom. His initial appearance seems generically related to similar appearances of the Wild Man of the Forest in romance narrative and would not be out of place in plays like The Old Wives Tale or Old Fortunatus. The more strikingly Tom's costume is geared toward the semblance of savagery, the more likely such an impression. So the Fool's cries of "a spirit, a spirit!" could offer temporarily a romantic or supernatural interpretive possibility for the audience, complicated but not precluded by the comedy of the Fool's flight. Given Tom's sudden entrance, his aggression in chasing out the Fool, his roaring, which might mimic the "fie, foh, fum" of a

fairy tale adversary, and his savage and mutilated appearance, Tom does initially convey the potential for dangerous violence and thus exploits what Michael Macdonald claims was the pervasive reaction in Shakespeare's day of the sane to the very mad: fear.¹²

The Fool's reaction, then, initiating as well as diffusing the responses of comedy and terror, activates both components of the grotesque. The Fool channels our reflexive reaction along the border between fear and comedy which traverses the spectrum of laughter. He is an appropriate nuncio for the madman, eliciting from a mixed audience a variety of perceptions of what is occurring onstage. We might "see" a stage prank modulating into the clever satire of Harsnett or the cruder satire of the stage Bedlamite. Or perhaps we react with a burst of nervous laughter, which spent leaves us either perplexed and eager for Kent to resume command or else fascinated and hence already in league with Lear. Some of us may laugh loudly at the slapstick, harshly as though at the village idiot. Or perhaps we laugh at the surprise and then, overwhelmed by the mimetic context of the event, continue laughing but uncomfortably, or else stop laughing abruptly. In any case we laugh, and are thus committed to defending our immediate response by attempting to interpret an extraordinarily complex spectacle among other spectators responding diversely. The provocation unto interpretation makes us self-conscious.

Kent speaks sharply and authoritatively to the hideous wretch, commanding him forth into full view. His "Come forth" echoes Christ's command to Lazarus and adds a somber tone to the Fool's claim that Tom is a spirit, one of the damned resurrected. Poor Tom approaches the trio downstage with contorted reluctance: is it the fiend resisting the exorcist or interlocutor? the lunatic dreading abuse? the disguised nobleman dreading discovery? And yet we have no guarantee that Edgar is visible "beneath" the guise of Poor Tom, no reason to assume that he affirms what we take to be our privileged knowledge that it is he strategically wielding a role of his own creation. He is not compelled to wink or nod to us, or to display any conscious distancing from the enactment of Poor Tom, to display any struggle between internal character and external assumed role. Nowhere in the entire scene is there indicated any aside to us, nor any exchange which demands that Edgar step out of the role of Tom. Thus while Tom makes his way downstage into full view, we recall that this is supposed to be Edgar in disguise, and we marvel at the dexterity of his disguising, savoring each detail of the costume in the greater spectacle before us, awaiting him to acknowledge us as his collaborators.

The actor has two quite distinct performance alternatives, each with its own advantages. If the actor exploits the character's awareness of his adopted role, the result is a fine complication of multiple perspectives. While Lear, Kent,

the Fool, and Gloucester all respond to Tom, simultaneously and in different ways, the actor has the option of responding in turn as Tom, as Edgar filtered through the language and gestures of Tom, or even, in the occasional unguarded moment, purely as Edgar (which might arouse suspicion and require a performative cover-up). Exploiting the Edgar/Poor Tom split elicits all the more our admiration for the character's performative virtuosity, it sensitizes us to the ironies in some of Tom's descriptions and commentaries, and it amplifies the suspense of his true identity's possibly being discovered, especially in the sequence with his father--and the mimetic pathos and suspense of their reunion is itself highlighted by our awareness of Edgar's awareness of his use of the role.

However, if the actor chooses to remain resolutely "in the character" of Poor Tom, he generates a tremendous tension in the audience which operates on both intellectual and emotional levels. On an intellectual level, this development (or this withholding of an expected development) places us in a complex and uncomfortable relation to the characters onstage, for we think we know more than Lear and company but can no longer be certain. We look closely for a gaffe, a flaw in the costume or the performance, some revelation of self-awareness in the character. The longer this is denied us, the more we are driven unwillingly toward the lower level of knowledge of those onstage, stripped of privilege, not

unlike Lear. We share unexpectedly in the epistemological crisis occurring onstage. On an emotional level, we languish without the assurance indispensable to the enjoyment of any comic performance that all will be well, that someone benign (actor or playwright) is in control. Instead, the longer the actor remains "in character," the greater our alarm that something has gone wrong, that we do not in fact comprehend this increasingly shocking figure, that this might not even be Edgar, or that Edgar really is mad, perhaps the result of duress, and is now beyond reach, unknown and unpredictable. As the suspense of our uncertainty grows, the actor has a new resource, the sudden unveiling--presumably to us only--of the character/role split, which thus obtains all the more dramatic impact and might be timed at a crucial moment, such as Gloucester's entrance. Such an effective but indecorous surprise constitutes simply one more of the play's many "cruel jokes" (i.e., aroused expectations left unfulfilled) upon the audience.

These divergent possibilities inhere in Poor Tom's approach downstage. Delivered either as he edges forward or only after he assumes an acting spot downstage, Tom's first line ("Away! the foul fiend follows me!" [45]) has the terrified bluster of the village idiot dreading the cruel ritual of the provocation to rage and frenzy produced for the entertainment of a regular audience of locals. This emblem further employs the mixture of the comic and the terrifying

which in this case underlies that process of prodding the village lunatic into comic contortions which culminate periodically in violent lunges at the crowd, who derive their joy-ride thrill through eliciting a more or less known degree of actual danger. However, Tom is not a known village idiot but an unknown madman. And Edgar has earlier told us that the character he will portray has the wherewithal, through "lunatic bans" and through the dread engendered by the shock of his appearance as a "horrible object," to "enforce their charity" (2.3.20). We gather, then, that Poor Tom is both capable of genuine intimidation but also, whipped from tithing to tithing, subject to violent abuse, whether vented for amusement or out of fear. In conjunction with fearful itinerant beggar emblems, this figure shouting to his audience to depart is on a literary level the Wild Man of romance and fairy tale, whose huffing and puffing creates yet also deflates the sense of danger, constrained as it is by its own convention. Thus the reactions, either from us or from the onstage audience, to Poor Tom's opening line are radically unpredictable, for at this point we may find the figure comic, terrifying, or both. The context, then, of Tom's opening line is the enactment of pure grotesquerie. Our diverse responses could be variously distributed onstage--Kent glaring aggressively, the Fool now giggling or else cowering behind Kent, and Lear staring in concentration or gazing in wonder.

Tom in his second line lapses into a snatch from a song: "Through the sharp hawthorn blow the cold winds" (45-46), a dire poetic image of the wretch exposed to the winter elements forced to detour along a brutal hawthorn hedge, an image imposed poetically and gesturally upon the mutilated arms. This second utterance is entirely different from the first and may be performed in at least two radically different ways. It may be introverted and hence pathetic, a withdrawal into himself, a private woe relived. Thus Tom goes from an initial lashing out to a retreating within, which expresses in another way his alienation and his desire to be left alone, but which also contributes to the disjointedness of his performance and thus on a broader scale to its overall mania. But the song phrase may delivered in an extroverted manner (which I prefer), simultaneously comic and defamiliarizing. It is the much hoped-for mad antic, that highly sought Bedlam entertainment. Yet the emblem created by the song and the arms stifles laughter. In its way such a delivery is deferential to both audiences, since it seems an antic performed in hope of a reward (charity onstage, laughter off), but if so it is poorly timed to be entertaining and if anything aggressively defies us to laugh. It would be feasible for the actor to let "Edgar" show through here, to play this as a "mistake," as a poor attempt at playing the comic madman, resulting in the attempt in his next line ("Humh! go to thy bed and warm thee") once more to

get the intruders to leave. This third line apparently commences with a shiver and might be an instruction to himself to retire back into the warmth of the hovel, but in any case expresses his desire to be left unharassed in his alienation.

At the outset of his performance, we see that Poor Tom is an interpretive enigma to us and to his fellow exiles. A refugee from the subplot, he has crossed over into the main storyline (as if it could contain refuge), irrevocably complicating it. Tom is grotesque, eliciting simultaneously fear and laughter, curiosity and shock, uneasiness and scorn, and a confusion of expectations, thus wielding tremendous potential for dazzling, bewildering, and alienating an audience. And we might recall here that the plot development in the "heath" scenes is minimal, even static for long stretches of time, the hiatus in action amplifying Tom's defamiliarizing effect, Tom's "meaningless" performance extending that stasis. Without action to shape our perspective, we in the audience share the confusion of those onstage, our privileged knowledge of events so undermined that we become dependent upon the characters' reactions for composing our own.

We are watching a play within a play, the madman performing for his audience. If Edgar does not reveal himself to us, he cannot be our interpretive guide to Tom's performance. And his ability and opportunity to reassure us

are constrained by his unwieldy disguise, by the onstage mimetic demands upon him, and by the rigors of a frenzied enactment.

Among the other characters, can we assert the existence of any dialogue with madness in this scene? On a surface level, there is no dialogue with Tom at all. Questions are almost never answered; answers are ignored. Tom and Lear both pursue monologues only partially interrelated, isolated by self-interest, and moving at cross-purposes. Much of Tom's performance consists of a vigorous but stylized begging routine, with its conventional attempts to evoke pity and hence charity. Lear's persistent, even comical attempts to impose upon Tom's condition and behavior his obsessive interpretation, that Tom is the victim of unkind daughters, transforms his "dialogue" with Tom into a contest to elicit pity, a sort of inverted flyting. Responses to mad speech--to the self-representation of madness--constitute not dialogue but a struggle to interpret that speech as a linguistic object and to assimilate it into one's own discourse. But this object proves illusory, as we shall see. The power struggle over appropriating the madman affords no stable rhetorical structuring, and ultimately tolerates no monologic imposition. No decisive interpretation ever emerges onstage.

Tom's first three lines create three personae, the demoniac, the lunatic, and the beggar, and initiate three performative modes: the possessed, enacted with appropriate grimaces, contortions, and threats; the Bedlamite, marked by

a sudden extroverted display of entertainment and employing such devices as singing, capering, and miming; and the beggar, represented in this case ("Humh! go to thy bed and warm thee") in the form of an intentionally pathetic beggar's blessing which is actually a plea to be left alone. Tom's "prologue" inaugurates a tour de force Bedlamite performance and both multiplies and intensifies the competing and often contradictory stimuli which his sudden appearance and launching into performance has generated for both audiences onstage and off. Yet over and above the noisy stage chaos, the dazzling visual spectacle, and the rapidly proliferating effects and contexts of defamiliarization, Lear's response to Tom's prologue is incongruous, disjunctive to the point of being comic: "Didst thou give all to thy daughters? / And art thou come to this?" (48-49). The rhetorician of the conscience who has just commanded Pomp "to feel what wretches feel" now demands that such a wretch feel what he feels. The prayer for a vengeful visitation upon the callous king becomes a ploy for pity for the forgotten father. The rhetorical wretch whom the self-judging king summoned, and who in physical response appears immediately, functions now as an emblem not of the injustice of Lear the monarch to his poor subjects but of the injustice of the wicked daughters to Lear the father. It is as though Lear has separated the role of monarch from "himself" in the dramatized ritual rhetoric of the prayer-trial, condemned it and thereby redeemed it, as

he shivers in the storm outside the hovel, intact for the moment. He has now upon Tom's appearance elected to follow out the role of betrayed and discarded father, the way that madness lies. He seeks in Tom the company of a fellow discarded father, but will find it only in the fourth act in the figure of Gloucester.

Yet if Lear is seeking a fellow discarded father, it seems hardly for genuine fellowship. His sympathetic identification with Poor Tom does not occur until later. Now Lear wants Tom to be a mouthpiece for Lear's wretched condition, but Tom's self-expression of his own plight is inconveniently irrelevant to Lear's discursive purpose. Lear seems to wish to resume a dramatic dialogue between his various personae, only this time with a physically (not only rhetorically) external persona, a prop, a mere body whom Lear will possess with a voice. Yet beneath this effort to appropriate the poor naked wretch for his own discursive purpose may lie an even less companionable motive, for perhaps Lear is attempting to project his own feared fate upon Tom. He may see in Poor Tom a possible scapegoat, a substitute victim for his (own) wicked daughters. Again Lear poses choric questions, but this time he does not answer them himself in contrived persona. Since Tom's answers are not useful, Lear ignores them and continues, rhetorically composing what may be a formal sacrifice as a means of furthering his resistance to his daughters and especially to the role of deceased father

which they wish to confer upon him. He does not embrace either Tom or the role of naked wretch until the "unbuttoning" episode. In his initial response to Poor Tom he is simply taking advantage of a sudden opportunity to multiply himself among personae and so avoid humiliation and death.

By any standard Lear's response to Poor Tom is bizarre and unexpected. Now it is time for Tom to ignore's Lear's reply, or more precisely, to re-route it and then ignore it. He substitutes for Lear's discarded father his own discourse of self-representation, that of the tormented demoniac, and commences with the first of four set-pieces which I call "songs" to emphasize that they are self-contained (the first two conclude punctuated by stage thunder) and related to a central theme, but also to emphasize their highly histrionic nature. The first song (50-61) I call the Suicide Song, related to its literary precedents of the Mad Sinner and the Dialogue with Despair; the second (83-98) is the Servingman Song, related to the confessional rogue literature of the 1590's; the third (112-121) is the Charm, in which Poor Tom tries to drive away the foul Flibbertigibbet, and is the purest example of Harsnettian demonianism; and the fourth (126-138) is the Hunger Song, possibly related to the popular Utopian traditions about Cockayne. Because in the present study we are less interested in tracing literary precedents than in describing theatrical performance, we shall not strive to "place" with precision each song into a formal

generic tradition. Rather, we shall be content merely to mention a few obvious analogues, for our purpose is to sketch only the broadest range of dramatic expectations which the formal mode would likely generate and exploit. Before we begin explicating the first song, we should make a few general observations about these songs, how they are related and how they function performatively.

The most overtly demoniacal pieces are the first, the opening Suicide Song, and the third, the Charm against Flibbertigibbet. They occur at moments when Edgar is most likely to be afraid: at the outset, while first being scrutinized by the trio (including the potentially hostile Kent), and immediately upon the entrance of Gloucester, his father who seeks his death. Michael MacDonald offers something of a semiotic reading of the lunatic behavior of the time:

Popular religious beliefs spanned the chasm of incomprehension that lay between the insane and their observers. Although literally incoherent, their thoughts and words conveyed an understandable idea that observers grasped without even being aware of it. That idea was simple: Their anguish was like the pangs of death; the peril of damnation was terrifyingly near. [13]

The images of demonic attack and possession and of imminent damnation constitute the most extreme language which the culture can provide for expressing terror, and its usage in these two songs may provide a reliable barometer to the level of Edgar's/Tom's projected or even experienced fear as he performs. The other two songs if less impelled by terror are presumably more calculated or at least more manically enter-

taining. Both have analogues in humbler literature--pulp novels and folk ballads--though the Servingman Song has ties with ecclesiastical and legal rites and hence is potentially an ironic variant of confession or exorcism. It is probably the least choreographically mimed, and is the most self-conscious effort at self-representation. The final Hunger Song, as we shall see, is contrived deliberately to shock and offend. These broad distinctions that I make among the various songs are based solely on textual and literary inferences and are, of course, easily nullified should the actor adopt more subjective performative strategies.

Tom in his first full set-piece describes the fiend's tempting him to suicide, a scene recurring in a number of morality and public theater plays. In these dramatic predecessors, the devil or Vice with his merry cohorts has already made considerable inroads into the soul of his intended victim, often through specious argumentation, peer pressure, and fleshly temptations. But the temptation to suicide is of a different order which affords less comedy. It tempts the audience as well as the afflicted protagonist in that it offers on the didactic level an immediate rough justice, a grim but possibly effective satisfaction of literary expectations generated by the plot. This situation always provides a fine climactic moment in which the protagonist struggles passionately, eliciting fear and pity with his cries of doom. The audience is implicated in the terrors

of judgment, for the play in effect announces: "You laughed at his folly, you laughed at his sin; laugh now at his eternal damnation." In plays which substantially employ the grotesque, the sudden removal of comedy reveals terror. Satire becomes curse, slapstick fearful violence. Mercy, if forthcoming, is highly effective dramatically and didactically. If denied, the didactic result is the terrifying display of divine judgment. The dramatic result is tragedy which, as Timothy Reiss argues, in its earliest phase (i.e., Morality) functions for a culture as the discourse of "that radical 'suffering' that is the impossibility of utterance."¹⁴ The platitudes which "place" the moral tragedy of damnation are themselves fearful in the feebleness of their consolatory explanation of the gruesome spectacle, of their inability to articulate hermeneutically the events which they represent. The gap between event and proffered interpretation which tragedy both generates and exploits is filled by the fear and wonder of the audience. The real message, the real discourse of such moral tragedy, is contained precisely in the audience's response to the spectacle of damnation.

The allusive context of Tom's first song is thus quite sober and lends itself to the beggar's more immediate aim of evoking pity. The first observation to make about the "song" is of its bipartite structure, the first half being either a recitative or an enactment of the temptation to suicide,

the second being a begging routine, replete with blessings, complaints, and presumably an offering of the empty drinking horn to receive charity. We may infer that this account and/or miming of the fiend's temptation to suicide functions as a prelude to the begging which advertises and possibly dramatizes Tom's wretchedness and dire need. As for the temptation sequence itself, we note first its relative copiousness, its extensive catalogue of dangerous torments and deadly temptations. More numerous than in the traditional dramatic enactment of the fiend's proffered rope and knife, the temptations to suicide form a substantial catalogue which both swells a declamation and reveals considerable detail about the madman's relationship with the fiend who possesses him. In general, this fiend, Tom tells us, has as a treacherous guide led him to many a dangerous pass, the same function which Tom will provide the blinded Gloucester later. The fiend has acted the hobgoblin, the disembodied voice appearing in *ignis fatuus* and by deception leading the disoriented vagabond to his destruction in the wilderness, a history that accords with the savage appearance which Tom now presents. But in what could conceivably refer to an earlier period in their relationship, Tom describes a series of frightening temptations which occur in an aristocratic environment ("pillow"; "pew"; "bay trotting horse"), which accords with our mimetic knowledge of Edgar and which anticipates the Servingman persona.

The very highlighting in Tom's narrative of this relationship between fiend and demoniac leads us to suspect that this song is more than mere declamation. In fact, the more palpable the actor wishes to make the fact of demon possession, the more likely he is not just to recite the tale but to mime it in the presence or to the accompaniment of an invisible or imagined fiend. It is precisely the invisibility of Tom's fiend which makes the episode potentially a departure from the stage tradition of temptation-to-suicide scenes. For the convention, as in Mankynde, or Dr. Faustus, or A Looking Glass for London and England, deriving from the Psychomachia tradition which externalizes the competing spiritual forces, prescribes that a somber or mocking fiend figure approach and in silence or with incantatory accompaniment offer the knife or rope. However, Tom may well mime these temptations as though compelled by an invisible, internalized force which jerks him about like a puppet. MacDonald observes that "the popular urge to personify illnesses as the actions of invisible creatures" characteristically led to the interpretation of these tormenters as demons.¹⁵ Harsnett describes the demons' reputed tendency to lodge in a given area of the victim's body (according to the satirist, usually in the nether regions) and to traverse the rest of the body at will.¹⁶ Some such stage enactment by Tom illustrates as well as describes frenzied possession, and results in a wild dervish-like

dance. In sequence, jerked from stance to stance, Tom conceivably "hotfoots" it through the flames, spins through the whirlpool, stumbles through the bog; then crumples into a sleeping position, sits in his pew, eats from his bowl, and gallops after his shadow. For us the effect is comic because the enactment is startling and spectacular, farcical and slapstick, and breathlessly engaging in its invention. Yet our laughter is complicated by Tom's terror or muted by the potential violence of the lunatic, and complicated further by our being metadramatically distanced from the performance, since this display is "not for us" but for that audience onstage whom we watch watch.

If Tom mimes the Suicide Song, either he abruptly halts, the demon leaving him, or he comes out of his final caper with the hunting horn now the drinking horn, which he offers to his audience as though passing the hat for donations after a good performance. There follows the begging routine, with its blessings, its pathos, and its direct plea. Panting after his exertions, Edgar has a moment to size up the reaction of his audience, and if they are stunned and hence disarmed, he continues more comfortable now in his role. The begging routine is easier, more conventional, and relatively credible to his audience. It may be that in the aftermath of his initial frenzied outburst he now is growing more confident in the persona, sounding phrases now ("Bless thy five wits," and "Tom's a-cold") which become refrains that

characterize the persona. The beggar's blessing--"Bless thee from whirlwinds, star-blasting, and taking!" (58-59)--is certainly a veiled curse, a catalogue of supernatural disastrous afflictions which the demoniac, his audience fears, might have the ability to levy. This element of intimidation or danger should remind us that if Poor Tom, who by embarking on the begging routine re-contextualizes his opening possessed frenzy, is becoming for us more histrionically resolved and thus, in a way, more clearly defined, it is those onstage who experience the crisis of the compulsion to respond. We have a tentative interpretive theory to sustain us, that Poor Tom is pretending possession so as to beg effectively and with impunity. We may wait and see. Those onstage are immersed in an interpretive crisis.

Perhaps because his plea for charity fails, or perhaps because it appears it may succeed, Poor Tom is pulled abruptly out of his begging routine by a resurgence of the fiend: "There could I have him now, and there, and there again, and there" (60-61). His first song ends as Tom chases the fiend who robs him of the ability to articulate (to beg). Perhaps he chases this invisible demon about and about the stage, or perhaps, more in keeping with Harsnett, he pursues it as it convulses throughout his body, twitching and pinching himself in torment. This self-destructing opening song at its conclusion is punctuated sharply by a burst of cannonball thunder and squib lightning above-stage: "Storme

still" (61; F1 only). The Storme may intervene and provide closure, leaving Tom panting and silent in the wake of his routine, as he and his audience stare in silence for a moment, interpreting one another, creating a tableau which we perceive as a tense ensemble. Otherwise, after the Storme Tom may silently continue his wretched pinching and convulsions as Lear and the others interpret his stunning performance, creating a tableau which we perceive as split. For while Tom's abrupt cessation of verbal discourse focuses our attention on the trio's response, yet his extended gyrations continue to fascinate us and provide the actor ample means by which to upstage the others. The more that Tom either subsides into dormancy or mindlessly repeats the same self-contained gestures, the more we resume watching the three watch Tom. I prefer having all onstage cringe in terror at each burst of stage thunder, that radical choric intrusion which interrupts the stage-business at hand. Hence Tom's performance abruptly ceases, and the next episode emerges from a moment of deep silence.

Tom is now reduced to a mute object for the commentary of the trio, who proceed to argue over interpreting him. Lear resumes his assertion as though unperturbed by the manic performance, attributing Tom's condition to wicked daughters. Lear would subsume Tom's wretchedness and his appeal for pity to his own cause and make it testify on behalf of all discarded fathers to the forces of retributive justice: "Now

all the plagues that in the pendulous air / Hang fated o'er men's faults light on thy daughters!" (66-67). But Lear's curse, superficially on Tom's behalf but actually on his own, strikes us as all the more awkward since he delivers this curse in an effort to drown out the Fool. When Lear rhetorically asks, "Couldst thou save nothing?", the Fool responds subversively, "Nay, he reserved a blanket, else we had been all shamed" (64-65). The Fool's bawdy appeal to voyeurism--is Tom wearing anything under that blanket?--radically undermines mimetic illusion with its metadramatic reference to represented nakedness, to a crude costume which has power to confer a role, to the actor under Edgar under Tom, all three cringing under that modest blanket which suddenly is all that sustains the mimetic illusion at this point. Lear challenges the madman's power of self-representation; the Fool challenges representation itself, radically undermining Lear's interpretive aggrandizement by removing (verbally) the blanket upon which it, to our surprise, suddenly depends. Lear's subsequent attempt to shout down the Fool, to restore forcibly his own version of the mimetic illusion, demonstrates that the irruption of madness has occasioned a hermeneutic power struggle which Lear deems crucial.

When Lear shouts his curse upon Tom's daughters, he must struggle as much to restore the mimetic illusion as to sustain his invalid point. Kent responds, "He hath no daughters, Sir" (68), typical of his attempts to woo Lear

back to the fold of patience and reason by appealing to common sense. His statement is so simple and true that it restores mimesis far more effectively than does Lear's bluster and thus is all the more convincing a rejoinder, quietly entering the interpretational fray by implying that Tom not only has no daughters, but has nothing whatever to which one should be induced to respond. Kent would ignore Tom altogether if Lear would. However, Lear's furious reply, "Death, traitor!" (69), so transfixes Kent's disguise and pins him tightly within his assumed role of ignorant servant, that by suddenly returning into Kent's and our awareness this forgotten plot element, Lear's reply is even more potently restorative of mimesis than was Kent's "realistic" one. Thus Lear for the moment wrests away the power to define the reality of the play, so that the continuation of his asserted interpretation of Tom commences not as absurdly disjointed but as absurdly grounded in the mimesis of the play. Lear "proves" his case:

Death, traitor! Nothing could have subdu'd nature
To such a lowness but his unkind daughters.
Is it the fashion that discarded fathers
Should have thus little mercy on their flesh?
Judicious punishment! 'twas this flesh begot
Those pelican daughters (69-74).

First Lear radically undermines Kent's assertion by revealing (to us) Kent's disguise, and he then proceeds to declare imperially his counter-truth. His next move is the most intriguing, for he now appropriates Tom's very body (as might

a fiend) to illustrate his argument. In appealing to the evidence of Tom's flesh, to those mutilated arms, Lear succeeds in forcing us to see Tom as a visual metaphor illustrative of his own condition. The arms are outrageous enough to seem not to belong to any other context, as though they were detached or detachable (like a phallus, as we shall see), and so they are readily contextualized. The Fool chooses the blanket, the more metadramatically vulnerable costume element which accords with his own status of peripheral, solo performer. Lear embraces the arms and makes them emblematic of his own condition. He neutralizes his companions as competing interpretants and usurps enough mimetic authority, or at least removes its constraints upon him, to enable him to impose upon us his perception not only of events, but of objects as well.

Let us elaborate upon the interpretive transactions. Tom's performance has operated on a bedazzling number of levels, and is then concluded by the refrain of the storm, which is sensorially constant but which "says" something different each time it recurs in a new context. If the storm provides a certain continuity in linking episodes, in this its most curious context yet it speaks of deepening alienation and defamiliarization, the thunder evoking dread of the judgment which before was exposed exile and now is madness, the lightning producing flashes of illumination and alarm that this is precisely the way madness lies. The

Fool's remark about Tom's blanket comically subverts Lear's self-pitying rhetorical inquest and opens a metadramatic vortex in the scene which is amusing and perhaps, to us, even comforting in reminding us that this is "only" represented suffering. But if metadrama is comfort for us, for Lear it is crisis. To Lear, restoring mimesis is intricately caught up in retaining his grip on sanity. Poor Tom and the Fool threaten to "team up" and reduce the play to burlesque, to diffused solo performances played directly to the audience. To restore the mimetic illusion Lear must not only subdue the Fool and appropriate Tom for his own purposes, he must dominate us, the audience, as well.

Lear's first major contribution to patching the hole in the mimetic illusion lies simply in his retention of character consistency, in his resolutely retained delusion. After the Fool's quip, Lear's curse on Tom's daughters pulls us violently out of metadrama towards mimetic illusion, yet we know his assertion to be mimetically impossible. We possess privileged information and hence assume our superiority over Lear in this regard. Kent's calm and reasonable reply expresses concisely what we know: "he hath no daughters." Lear's stunning reply, "Death, traitor!" instantly penetrates Kent by reminding him of his dire vulnerability. But it penetrates us as well: suddenly, Lear does know what we know, and before we remember knowing it, for we had forgotten about Kent's disguise. As our

mimetic memory ironically undermines our sense of superiority, we are briefly paralyzed, as is Kent despite (or because of) his knowledge. Into this brief and tiny gap, while memory forces knowledge to evaluate itself, Lear substitutes his interpretation of Tom, turning the tables on us and usurping superiority, if only briefly. He proceeds before our very eyes to convert Tom's mutilated flesh into that of a discarded father. Tom's presence as grotesque object, used metadramatically by the Fool, has been marshalled to restore mimesis.

To counter the Fool's "reading" of Poor Tom, Lear avoids the risky evidence of the blanket and takes for his purposes the lacerated arms. His rebuke having squelched with unexpected efficacy the hermeneutically competing Kent, Lear proceeds with enough confident detachment in his anatomization of Tom to inject a satiric note, the sartorial pun of "fashion," which rivals the Fool's in its implicit ridicule of the wretch but which insists on the mimetic reality of the object--the arms--to the extent that they function for him with analogical utility. But here Lear's dominance is contingent upon Tom's remaining an inert object, deprived of the capacity for self-representation. Lear will find his victorious appropriation only temporary, his effort Pyrrhic. For as Lear extends his meditation--"Judicious punishment! 'twas this flesh begot / Those pelican daughters"--perhaps he forgets that Tom can still represent himself.

Lear negligently leaves his dominant discursive position vulnerable, using an unexpected word unusually: "pelican." Poor Tom retorts with a pun, impossible to foresee: "Pillicock sat on Pillicock hill: Alow, alow, loo, loo!" (75-76), a pun he illustrates by suddenly squatting with his staff protruding upward between his legs (perhaps his "hello down there" shout is directed at "us" below). No longer the marionette, Tom is now Priapus. Not content to make visible his own condition etched in Tom's flesh, Lear adds evaluative commentary with the confidence of the ironist. But the Wild Man with alarming ease transforms Lear's subtle argument into crude obscenity. Lear's observation, that progeny devour the flesh which recklessly begot them, is only superficially self-implicatory because his ironic tone not only distances Lear from literal culpability but is intended to be acerbic enough to redound upon the daughters. With lewd whooping and gesturing, Tom's obscene miming sweeps up Lear's relatively chaste "begot" into a brutal depiction of phallic sexuality, transforming Lear's imperial begetting into an idiot's indiscriminate copulation. Tom, by exploiting the voyeuristic tension of the blanket, "sides" with the Fool in his act of self-interpretation, and yet he beats Lear at his own game as well. For where Lear verbally juxtaposes Tom's mutilated arms and flesh-devouring daughters, Tom visually juxtaposes the arms, the rhetorically-invoked carnivorous daughters, and the starkly-poised

phallus, which images not only the copulative act that begot those daughters, but their subsequent retributive castration of the father as well.

Ironically, it is Lear himself who has insistently "fathered" the comparison between himself and the madman. Intending to excoriate his progeny and yet remain intact, Lear has inadvertently passed on the patriarchal phallus to the novitiate. For Poor Tom bears a certain resemblance to the trickster figure whom Paul Radin has studied, an adolescent figure whose sexual adventures include carrying his phallus in a box on his back; sending it across the river to his bride (cp. Tom's "Bessy" song, 3.6.25ff.); having it grow to enormous size, cutting off its excess, and scattering it, where it springs up as plants; etc. These experiences with the phallic object constitute part of his "biological education" at the completion of which he will "become a male and attain sex consciousness,"¹⁷ thus "developing some sense of social and moral responsibility."¹⁸ If Lear has seen in Tom's mutilated arms an emblem of his own castration by the daughters, he at least retains the grim satisfaction that they themselves will never bear or wield the phallus; and if his curses hold, they will never bear a babe to honor them. But the missing phallus severed by the daughters pops up suddenly from beneath Tom's blanket. The son now bears the phallus, which he must learn to use. The phallus restored, no more in this scene does Lear allude to daughters.

We must make one final pass through this passage wherein the trio argues over the interpretation of Poor Tom, for its culmination in the unveiling of the phallus is not only a ritual transference of phallic power from the old generation to the young, it also marks the reversal of discursive dominance in the scene, for Lear becomes noticeably submissive verbally, asserting himself only to "unbutton" in emulation of his mentor, the Philosopher. We should observe first that the dialogic struggle to interpret the madman in itself mimics the rhythms of mad language, its warp and woof, weaving from the mimetically impossible to the metadramatically obvious, to the mimetically proper and then to the mimetically paralyzed, to the imperatively declaimed and then to the subversively spectacular with its proliferating significations. Mad language itself, as we see with Tom and shall with Lear, proceeds likewise tortuously among the mimetically proper and mimetically absurd, the metadramatic and the profoundly wise--that which Edgar later calls "Reason in madness." The fact that the interpretation of madness mimics the rhythms of mad language should alert us to the seductive nature of mad language, which tempts one to engage and appropriate it, but which treacherously turns the language of the sane assailant into the language of madness. "Pillicock" is too illogical to be witty, but is fearfully subversive. There are two ways by which the sane avoid the traps of mad language. One is by the collective impassive

imposition of power upon madmen, constraining their self-representation into prescribed forms, such as Bedlamite antics, a begging routine, an exorcist's interrogation, or the confessional mode (assumed by the Servingman). The other is by simply ignoring madness, as does Kent, or Gloucester later in the scene: "In fellow, there, into the hovel: keep thee warm" (171). This is the statement which ushers madness away and excludes it altogether from dialogue. Knowing mad language to be dangerously seductive, the prudent sane refuse to listen to it, as though it were a Siren.

Even the Fool seems intimidated by Pillicock. His claim that "this cold night will turn us all to fools and madmen" (77) is yet another statement which wishes to function with the authority of summation. It is ironic that the Fool, who so impishly waxed metadramatic by joking about Tom's blanket, is now urgently appealing to mimetic authority. For what is "this cold night" to which he alludes? If the play is being performed at the Globe in daylight, he reminds us that the action onstage is occurring in a darkness created by mere words, a power conferred them by convention. (If, however, the play is being performed at a private theater, he may mean our [the audience's] night at the theater, the night within the theater, or the night within the play--a metadramatic appeal for comic relief, for altering the mimetic course of the play.) The Fool means that those onstage, and possibly we in the audience, are enveloped in a darkness which induces

pandemic madness. He claims that this night is the causal agent of madness, which may mean that the night obscures all visible relations, reducing people to disembodied voices which struggle to identify themselves by asserting fallacious explanations of that very darkness (such as the Fool's). Or conversely, perhaps as Tom reserved a blanket, so the Fool reserves the night, that which will cover the cause, if any, of pandemic madness. What if there is a potentially visible cause of madness, a fiend or a bristling phallus? Tom has stipulated the cause of madness to be the foul fiend; Lear, daughters; the Fool, "this cold night." Tom will soon adopt a new persona, the Servingman, who will confess another cause of madness--the phallus. The Fool's cover of night will scarcely hide what the blanket could not, what Lear, Tom, and the Fool all have seen. If anything, this darkness only encourages the return of the fiend, like a roving incubus.

Tom's next speech, too short to constitute what I have called a song, resumes the demoniac's performance. The speech commences, "Take heed o'th'foul fiend" (78), for which there are two completely different performance options, depending upon how we read "take heed." If we take it to mean "beware," then Tom has become chastened after his obscene outburst and volunteers himself as moral exemplum; he has in effect already assumed the confessional Servingman persona. He proceeds with a catechistic litany of moral commands which, coming from a madman, are dubiously reliable

as admonition. He falls silent, eliciting from Lear this prompting to continue: "What hast thou bee?" (82). Lear's "thou" addresses this new Servingman persona, already in performance. But if "take heed" means "listen to" (syntactically less satisfactory, but conducive to better spectacle), then the fiend himself is about to be given voice for the first time. Thus far we have seen the fiend only as an invisible force, an implied partner in Tom's miming of the temptation to suicide, or as the invisible pursuer or pursued at the conclusion to Tom's first begging routine. If we follow this second option, Tom's next speech utilizes three different personae: a nuncio, literally a devil's advocate ("Take heed o'th'foul fiend"); the fiend himself ("Obey thy parents," etc.); and a spent and shivering demoniac ("Tom's a-cold"). We shall pursue this perhaps dubious second option since at some point we expect Tom to enact demon possession itself. If he does so here, the speech constitutes something of a fifth set-piece.

The Fool's comment, "This cold night will turn us all to fools and madmen," could serve to deepen that night if Tom, as if supporting this "prophecy," next speaks in the voice of the fiend who possesses him. Given the startling effect of the whooping phallus of his previous verbal ejaculation, we expect a highly agitated performance. It is possible that Tom extends his league with the Fool by imitating the Fool's routine of conversing with his bauble, which becomes whomever

or whatever the Fool stipulates. But more likely than the use of a bauble to represent the fiend who speaks is the resumption of Tom's evident bodily inhabitation by the fiend, who seizes the demoniac's wretched body to serve as his instrument through which to speak. Before, our evidence for the presence of the fiend came entirely through Tom's report while an invisible force jerked him about like a puppet. While Tom's movements for the present enactment are less spatially ranging than in the Suicide Song, the struggle is no less intense, marked more by a straining and tremulous resistance, and then by convulsions like labor pains as a hoarse, distant-sounding voice is born.

But the routine commences with the nuncio, who bids his audience to listen. This short-lived persona may be activated by a wrenching convulsion by which the fiend impels the victim to serve him thus. By "formally" summoning an audience, Tom apparently does take the Fool's prophecy as a cue to resume performance. There is a pause as the fiend's voice wells up as though from afar, substantiating the mimetic reality of the Fool's (inadvertently invoked?) madness-inducing night, emerging at last as an altogether different voice, probably a roar. The speech is oracular, chilling in the wretchedness of its priest and the torment accompanying his inspiration (not unlike Aeschylus's Cassandra). Typically of an oracle, the speech is fraught with ambiguity--not because of curious content but because of

dubious origination. For it is the father of lies who offers sound moral advice, leading us to listen intently for mocking parody of the prayer-book. If it mocks, this voice also seems to satirize Lear's earlier arbitrating voice of conscience, and it may also provide the voice of judgment which haunted the suicidal demoniac in his opening song. The fiend's final line, "set not thy sweet heart on proud array" (80), is the most mocking line of all, doubtless referring once more to Tom's blanket, and either rendering him an unlikely holy hermit or threatening to strip the wretch of such finery, in which case there may be an accompanying gesture which acts as if it might liberate Pillicock altogether. Some gesture of self-mockery would provide the fiend his best cue for exiting in a paroxysm, leaving the victim shivering and speaking now in his own voice, that of the pathetic beggar which Tom employed in his earlier begging routine.

Lear's response, "What has thou been?" may address this "restored" Tom. If so, his return from possession must be emphatic, and in his liberation he discovers energy enough to embark upon another song, so that Lear's prompting serves as a cue to resume performing after a pause. Or perhaps "Tom's a-cold" is merely a whimper from a frightened demoniac, and Lear plays the exorcist, or more precisely, the priestly interlocutor who commands the demon speak. If so, Lear assumes this function only for the nonce. The demoniac

continues writhing and convulsing as the fiend speaks through him. But more likely the Servingman Song is the sober confession of the wretch beneath the beggar. One of the more noticeable features of the speech is that it remains largely monosyllabic; though rhetorically more sophisticated than the preceding litany, developing into relative eloquence, like the litany it is punctuated throughout by short truncated phrases and labored monosyllables. This stylistic feature suggests the compulsory nature of the confession, like the language of one under torture who in his agony laboriously "remembers" a quasi-coherent string of sins and crimes. Certainly the Servingman produces a comprehensive catalogue containing a vast array of vices, all to make the point that he deserves the punishment he is suffering: the mad sinner. In a Foucauldian sense, this "individual" is no more than a locus, an intersection of offenses and their concomitant judgments. The penitent meticulously submits his use of language, his capacity for self-representation and hence for individuality, to the juridical discourse within which crimes are already judged. The wretch has, as it were, internalized the voice of judgment, that force within which wrenches from him his monosyllabic but comprehensive litany of sins and crimes. Consequently his recitation is entirely self-contained and, as with his opening song, is performed in conjunction with a partner invisible and inaudible to us. For his interlocutor, the voice of judgment, remains largely implied.

Unless, of course, Lear is unexpectedly restored here to the status of judge, hearing the wretch's confession and returning a verdict.

In a different sense, the profusion of details in the Servingman's account lends it the superficial appearance of being highly individualized, yet the composite figure which emerges is no more than a popular type, the ambitious rake who rises from the gutter and then returns there. If we quickly recognize the type through its parody, we might well expect and hence perceive that the account is satiric, and of course, the actor might play the speech this way. This presents the voice of judgment from a different perspective, and is derived from the conventional Bedlamite satire of the day; it is also similar to prodigal figures in the bourgeois city comedies. The implicit moral authority of such satire lies not in the aristocracy, as in the litanies of Foucauldian juridico-legal discourse, but in the bourgeoisie, not mystified by ecclesiastical rite and rhetoric but baldly materialistic in its appeal to all fathers with wealth to preserve. The amusement of satire lies primarily in postures and gestures recognizable as belonging to the known type under attack, but most of its entertainment value, as in the rogue novels, derives from the profusion of squalid details which imaginatively titillate repressed urges. Whether pathetic or satiric, the confessional account assumes a didactic posture which, as with the Morality Vice, permits a vicarious indulgence in forbidden behavior.

Our basic performance options, then, for the Servingman Song are that it is delivered in fear and pain as though physically extorted, recited by rote in a dull monotone as though at a trial, or offered reluctantly because of shame. But the more histrionically enacted, the more it tends to satire; even if offered didactically "straight," the combination of the speaker's grotesque appearance and manic gesturing comically subvert his exemplary function. The speech itself may appear disjointed, thus resembling typical mad language, but this appearance of incongruity is due to the conciseness of the report in what is actually a perfectly coherent and complete narrative--but one amenable to either of two readings. Our Servingman might be a fashionable and popular lover who, though breaking oaths and hearts and out-paramouring the Turk, eventually falls victim to his own lust and becomes enslaved to a woman or women: for he admonishes his interlocutor not to "betray thy poor heart to woman" (93-94). In the alternate reading, the moral progress develops more neatly. This tale traces in miniature the progress of a handsome servant who learns to dress fashionably and make his loves properly, arousing his mistress's lust and becoming her lover. She falls completely in love with him, while he swears countless oaths of love and fidelity to her, which he smugly breaks. Having worked his way into fashionable circles, he becomes a popular lover and is drawn into a life of unrestrained hedonism. From the sin

of lust springs a multitude of sins, such as drinking and gambling, and the speech culminates in a full catalogue of sins: "false of heart, light of ear, bloody of hand; hog in sloth, fox in stealth, wolf in greediness, dog in madness, lion in prey" (90-92). Thus his initial sin, pride ("A servingman, proud in heart and mind" [83]), produces narcissism and/or ambition, which leads to acts of prostitution. But if his sexual power leads him to numerous conquests, "out-paramour[ing] the Turk," it also engenders in him a lust which rages out of control, producing the array of beastly sins enumerated in his catalogue.

His downfall is his lust, the most direct cause of his ruin and the primary subject of the admonition with which this persona ends his speech. The Servingman is an exemplary emblem of lust and its fruits (other than treacherous progeny) and so is related to the trickster who bears Pillicock beneath his blanket. But "Pillicock" presumably belongs to a different persona, meaning that the phallus is the common denominator of both personae. And since the Servingman persona itself constitutes Tom's self-conscious and analytical account of his present status--the explanation of his ever-striking physical appearance--we may safely posit that Poor Tom is endemically associated with lust and with the phallus. He seems in large measure, like Edgar's father, to be an object-lesson on the regulation of phallic power. By his startling "Pillicock" exclamation, Tom re-

contextualized Lear's condemnation of pelican daughters by linking to it the brute act of copulation which results in this long-term retribution of progeny. Perhaps Tom's frightfully abused appearance also links crude copulative violence to self-mutilation. The phallus, it seems, tends to self-destruction.

The Servingman Song, in keeping with the "education of the trickster" motif (examined in the next chapter), treats the phallus in terms of power. The phallus confers power upon its wielder, this man who "in woman out-paramoured the Turk," compiling more conquests than the Sultan. And yet he "serv'd the lust of my mistress' heart" (84-45), which implies that her lust was (ultimately) greater than his phallic power, an allusion to the convention, cultural belief, or patriarchal fear that women possessed insatiable sexual appetites. Beneath this more or less rational lesson the in education of the trickster, that the indiscriminate overuse of the phallus is foolish misuse of the phallus, there lurks the fear that the phallus is weak in comparison to the bottomless vagina dentata, that the phallus is strong only in its ability to impel its wielder to self-destruction. The phallus "possesses" the man as the fiend does the demoniac, leading him to his destruction in the devouring pit, the vaginal hell. These images will be contemplated in detail by Lear in his 4.6 mad scene. The Servingman's parting admonition juxtaposes women and fiends:

Let not the creaking of shoes nor the rustling
 of silks betray thy poor heart to woman; keep
 thy foot out of brothels, thy hand out of
 plackets, thy pen from lenders' books, and
 defy the foul fiend (92-96).

To begin with, we cannot say with certainty whether the shoes and silks belong to the man or to the woman. If to the man, their noise as he approaches the woman to woo her "betrays" his desire for her and hence his vulnerability to engulfment by her. If to the woman, they are instruments of seduction, their sound inexorably awaking the phallus as though it were possessed of independent volition. In either case, the woman clearly controls the man, and the ensuing brothels, plackets, and lenders' books allude to the subsequent dealings of the man enslaved to the phallus which serves the woman. Presumably the "foul fiend" is the phallus itself, which suddenly "possesses" the man upon sexual arousal. The Servingman urges his hearers to defy its insistent leading. The temptation to suicide in the first song becomes the temptation to copulation in the second. In the first song, the fiend was invisible, manifesting itself by the convulsions it produces in the body it inhabited. Here the fiend has been verbally revealed in the Pillicock unveiling, manifesting itself in various bawdy gestures, and is further developed narratively in the Servingman's testimony. In each case the fiend tries forcibly to lead its victim to destruction. In each case the ultimate "evidence" corroborating the fiend's presence is the ruinous spectacle

of Tom's naked and abused body, which Poor Tom used to illustrate his plea for charity, which Lear appropriated to make his case against daughters, and which the Servingman now claims in order to warn about the fiend, ultimate cause of both penury and daughters.

Once more the extended persona of the song abruptly vanishes as Tom disjointedly resumes the refrains of the beggar and the demoniac. Once more his manic miming and muttering are sharply punctuated, sealed off, by "Storme still," a burst of thunder and lightning from the theater rafters. Lear's response is telling: "Thou wert better in a grave than to answer with thy uncover'd body this extremity of the skies" (99-100). Lear is responding both to Poor Tom and to "Storme still." As after Tom's Suicide Song, "Storme still" has so sealed off Tom's performance that Lear can virtually ignore the "argument" of the performance and respond to Tom as spectacle, interpreting freely. Earlier, Lear retained his obsessive idea, that Tom was the victim of daughters, but since the utter subversion by the introduction of Pillicock, phallic culpability has been inexorably established. Lear therefore is no longer interested in assigning the causes of Tom's nakedness, for nakedness itself is now a given that might conceivably serve a useful function for Lear. Lear responds once more by re-appropriating Tom's body, but he is now thinking of this nakedness as an "answer"--to the discursive proposition of "this extremity

of the skies," that is, to the incessant thunder and lightning of "Storme still." Lear clearly sees that Tom's real answer to "Storme still" is not his doleful lamentations and appeals for charity, but the "presented nakedness" which Edgar has orchestrated to "outface / The winds and persecutions of the sky" (2.3.11-12). Though he were better in a grave, Tom none the less has found the "correct" answer to the Storme, the one radically aligned with Lear's earlier prayer to the wretches in which Lear vows to "shake the superflux" of the Storme onto the lesser creatures beneath him. For, as Lear continues, Tom is not beholden to the creatures beneath him, the worm, the beast, the cat, the sheep, and is bearing the brunt of the Storme justly, without interposing his inferiors. Through this discovery Tom becomes for Lear a rare emblem of justice, in fact the only purely non-exploiting state which a human can attain. Such logic compels Lear to respond to the Storme as does Tom, with the correct "answer"--his own unbuttoning, his stripping to become "unaccommodated man." The unbutton-ing scene is the culmination of Lear's quest in the scene for a new persona, appeasing the voice of conscience and yet providing a fearful imperviousness to suffering which might still provide Lear opportunity to resume his shape with vengeance. That Lear's "quest" is over is emphasized by his subsiding into relative passivity and quiet for the remainder of the scene.

To fill out Lear's reasoning and to help explain the

necessity of this unbuttoning, we need only reconsider the overall pattern in the scene of Lear's responses to his wretched condition, a pattern made evident only now in Lear's response to the Servingman Song. In brief, Lear's thinking about his condition and his efforts at forging a new persona alternate between two poles: on the one hand, self-pity and the vengeful desire for restoration; on the other, the consolations of philosophy. Lear begins in the scene raging against filial ingratitude and vowing revenge, and breaking down in bereaved self-pity. He next swings toward the consolations of philosophy in the prayer to the wretches, wherein he articulates the broader problem of injustice and arbitrates impassively against his own Pomp. He returns to the theme of ungrateful daughters in his early reactions to Poor Tom, wishing upon them "all the plagues" that hang "in the pendulous air." But the pendulum is in Lear's mind, which returns once more after the Servingman Song to philosophical speculation: "Is man no more than this? / Consider him well" (100-101). Lear is "beyond" such transitory details as daughters or the vicissitudes of power politics or causes and effects, accepting now the "purpose" of the Storme in judging all, accepting now the "meaning" of his affliction. Lear submits to philosophical necessity and strips himself, becoming the unaccommodated man. But there is beneath the philosophical resignation a strategy like Edgar's, to interpose his nakedness as though it might

propitiate the Storme God, a desperate sacrifice to prevent the more radical nakedness of madness. The "Philosophy" is likely no more than a specious and strategic interpretation of his powerlessness. Lear now accepts nakedness as the only correct answer to the Storme, to that insistent and irresistible refrain, to that monotonous language of thudding thunder and squirting squib. The Storme is sovereign and abides but one response, the cringing of naked beasts. Lear will for now let his nakedness, like Tom's, "speak" for him.

Kent struggles to restrain Lear's effort at unbuttoning, with what measure of success we cannot determine. The Fool excitedly chatters advice to his master to remain clothed:

Prithee, Nuncle, be contented; 'tis a naughty night to swim in. Now a little fire in a wild field were like an old lecher's heart; a small spark, all the rest on's body cold. Look! Here comes a walking fire (108-111).

The Quarto has Gloucester enter at this point. The Fool's unusual comparison of the fire and the old lecher's heart is supposed to comprise a description of the coldness of the night (again the Fool's preoccupation with the night), but quibbles on "naughty," in its initial context being roughly equivalent to the expression, "nasty weather." The comparison of the small fire with the old lecher Gloucester is made by the juxtaposition of his entrance with the memorable verbal image. But the Folio even more firmly emphasizes the connection, having Gloucester enter earlier, at the commencement of the Fool's speech, so that the speech

functions as a "caption" to the old man as he walks squinting about the stage. The Folio also specifies that Gloucester is to enter "with a torch." The Folio revision, then, emphasizes the introduction of Gloucester's lechery, which is conducive to sustaining the phallic motif introduced by the Pillicock interjection and developed by the Servingman.

Gloucester's entrance precipitates a crisis for Poor Tom, the Edgar beneath probably now visible to us, who responds with terrified agitation, launching into his next song. This is the Charm with which Poor Tom hopes to drive away the intruder. Not a formal exorcism, the song derives instead from folk traditions and has two segments, the identification of the fiend, with commentary upon him, and the charm itself. Between the Servingman's testimony establishing the fiend as fundamentally phallic, the Fool's introduction of Gloucester as an old lecher, and Gloucester's association with fire, it is easy to perceive Gloucester as the phallic fiend who torments Tom. Although the fiend's name, Flibbertigibbet, is probably arbitrary, we should note its recurrence in 4.1 (Q1 only) when Tom enumerates the five fiends who have possessed him at once: "Flibbertigibbet, of mopping and mowing; who since possesses chambermaids and waiting women" (4.1.60-62). The "chambermaids and waiting women" probably allude to Harsnett's account of the female domestics coerced by seditious priests into acting as fraudulent demoniacs for their staged

exorcisms. But there are also overtones here on the super-natural level of the incubus, and on the social level of a lecherous aristocrat (Gloucester) who routinely exercises his *droite de seigneur*.

This first half of the Charm provides the other moment in Tom's performance which seems most conducive to the mimicking of an exorcised confession, to the producing of the voice of a fiend, as though Tom were producing the voice of the fiend inhabiting Gloucester. According to Tom's commentary, Flibbertigibbet is utterly baneful, roving at night in search of victims (e.g., dispossessed sons?), from evening until "first cock"--when the harbinger of daylight drives him back to hell or the grave. Flibbertigibbet leaves in his wake cripples, blighted fruit, and injured innocents. The "night-mare" whom Tom charms away is, of course, the incubus who roams at night in search of women with whom to copulate. In terms of the education of the trickster, Poor Tom is accusing the old lecher of abusing phallic power. This acquires added significance in terms of the father/son relationship, for Edgar accuses his father not only of unnatural malevolence (by implication, that which he directs toward his own flesh and blood), but of the very abuse of fatherly power which legitimates Edgar's purported claim that the "oppression of ag'd tyranny" (1.2.48) should no longer be endured. Gloucester's unrepentant abuse of the phallus through his adultery and lechery establishes the old sinner

as ripe for a fall, for replacement by a son who might properly exercise such authority. We are merely a logical step away from Edgar's fifth-act moralizing that "the dark and vicious place where thee [Edmund] he got / Cost him his eyes" (5.3.171-72). Thus the Charm might represent Edgar's urgent attempt to separate himself not so much from his father as from the sins of his father, so that judgment, if misdirected now, will eventually fall upon the culpable party. On a mimetic level, the Charm is the first complete musical song which Poor Tom has performed. This may be an appeal to conventional or expected Bedlamite behavior which Edgar hopes will augment his disguise and protect him from discovery by the fiendish father who would kill him.

Poor Tom's final song, his assertive response to Gloucester's demand to the group to identify themselves, forms what I call the Hunger Song, the main feature of which is a catalogue of some nine items (followed by references to two more), all of them disgusting, which Tom "in the fury of his heart, when the foul fiend rages, eats" (127-28). The song seems related, though obscurely, to various folk traditions. The catalogue of disgusting foods bears some resemblance once more to the Trickster tales recorded by Paul Radin, in which the deluded Trickster devours his own intestines, pieces of children, and the mothers of those children.¹⁹ Perhaps the feast is an inverted variant of the Cockaygne myth, a motif which Robert Weimann identifies as a

common feature in the English popular dramatic tradition and which usually appeared in the form of a song by a Fool figure.²⁰ The entire song (not just the catalogue) is reminiscent of the peasants' laments at the outset of The Second Shepherds' Play. These popular origins, with their²¹ often anti-authoritarian overtones, in conjunction with the revolting content of the piece suggest that the song is "offensive" in both senses of the term, both a hostile attack and a breach of decorum. The intent of the song apparently is to shock and disgust Gloucester such that he will find Tom repulsive and ignore him. Like the Charm, then, it is an effort, variously motivated, by Tom to drive away his potential tormentor. The effort is a resounding success, for Gloucester does not deign to reply to the loathsome madman, directing all his remarks to Lear, or later, to Lear's servant. The only time he speaks to the madman yields the remark we noted above--"In fellow, there, into th'hovel"--the statement which ushers away the madman, conceding him no more importance than one might a beast. The more vividly Gloucester conveys his repulsion to Tom in this scene, the greater the impact of his later soliciting Tom to be his guide; the discrepancy helps provide a measure of the degree of Gloucester's degradation. As the blinded Gloucester decides to entreat Tom's aid, he reveals that seeing the wretch "i'th'last night's storm . . . made [him] think a man a worm" (4.1.32-33).

Poor Tom's madness has developed in this scene along the lines of relationships with the two patriarchs, Lear for the earlier part of Tom's performance, Gloucester for the latter. Both relationships are brought to culmination simultaneously in a final stage emblem. Lear rejects Gloucester's offer to lead him to shelter in order to "talk with this philosopher," whom he draws aside for "one word in private" (151; 157). Lear and Poor Tom withdraw to one side of the stage and make conversation unheard by us. Meanwhile, Gloucester confides to Kent his own bereavement at the treachery of his supposedly good son. Our vision is thus radically bifurcated. The tableau works like this. When Kent warns Gloucester that Lear's "wits begin t'unsettle," Gloucester replies, "Canst thou blame him?" (159). At this moment occurs the scene's final burst of thunder and lightning: "Storme still." It might prove dramatically effective if after each bursting of the Storme all of the characters onstage were to cringe in fear for an instant (which would squelch Tom's performances and help inspire Lear to unbutton after observing the wretch's reaction to the Storme). Such a group response to the Storme produces a vacuum, a beat or two of profound silence onstage after each burst, before dialogue is resumed. This moment of silence would emphasize each first line delivered after the Storme's noise. Usually Lear has this privileged first line, but this time it is Gloucester's: "His daughters seek his death" (160). This

line contains the only vital information which Gloucester provides us in the speech. The rest of the speech expresses his personal anguish but is not dramatically indispensable, which means that nothing crucial is lost if during his confidences to Kent the pantomiming Lear and Tom spiritedly compete for our attention. Not that we wish to ignore Gloucester's speech, since it is a fine opportunity for the old man to lament and elicit pathos. "I had a son" is a doleful commencement to his lament, like David's mourning for Absalom, and his announcement of the topic surely creates a cross-stage dynamic with Tom. His incredulousness when he admits that Edgar "sought his life" is more cultural than egotistical and provides a clue to Edgar's seemingly unusual choice of disguises, that of the Bedlam beggar. Michael MacDonald observes that "reverence for the hierarchical bonds between parents and children and husbands and wives was so strong that it shaped popular conceptions of insanity," such that "rebelliousness was often a token of mental disturbance in the eyes of distressed elders."²² Perhaps Edgar reasons that even if caught, he might be exonerated by virtue of insanity, that his madness might be a plausible explanation for his behavior. Thus a possible source of suspense in this theatrical moment revolves about Gloucester's potential for arriving at such an explanation during his musings, and then making the connection with Poor Tom. But fortunately for Edgar, Gloucester remains absorbed in his own grief.

A moment before the Storme speaks, while Gloucester is ignoring Tom, Lear is ignoring Gloucester in favor of Tom, and begins posing questions. His first is, "What is the cause of thunder?" (152). But Tom's answer is prevented by Kent's entreaty to Lear to accept Gloucester's offer of shelter. Lear next asks Tom, "What is your study?" (155). Tom replies, "How to prevent the fiend, and to kill vermin" (156). At the word "fiend" Tom might glance at Gloucester, further illustrating the antipathy between them, and at "vermin" he might once again pinch at himself, as though he were hard-pressed to distinguish between the fiends and the fleas which inhabit his body. It is possible that Lear and Tom simply mime an uneventful conversation, the dialogue of which we cannot hear. Perhaps Tom and Gloucester exchange occasional suspicious or fearful glances at one another, thus illustrating Gloucester's speech. But at the burst of thunder, perhaps Lear revives his unanswered question: "What is the cause of thunder?" (We shall see that Lear in 4.6 displays an astonishing capacity to remember clearly and reply to a question asked much earlier.) If so, Poor Tom can answer the question easily, pointing up to the theatrical Heaven (in a public theater performance) and directing Lear's sight to the metal trough where a stagehand drops the cannonball, and up higher to the hut where another hand lights the squibs. Poor Tom could pass on to Lear the metadramatic awareness possessed by every performer, the

knowledge which in this play might pass for wisdom. Lear, having just been brought by Tom to an acceptance of the brutal mimetic condition to which he has been reduced, having just learned the mimetically correct answer of abject submission to the Storme, may now be given by Tom a glimpse of a possible way out of his dismal destiny, a way which points outside the play itself.

NOTES

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5. Samuel Harsnett, A Declaration of Eggregious Popish Impostures (London, 1603).
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8. Salgado 197.
9. John Awdeley, The Fraternity of Vagabonds. 1565. Cony Catchers and Bawdy Baskets, ed. Gamini Salgado (London: Penguin, 1972): 69.
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11. Michael Hattaway, Elizabethan Popular Theatre (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1982): 27ff.
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13. MacDonald 145.
14. Timothy Reiss, Tragedy and Truth (New Haven: Yale UP, 1980): 6.
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16. Harsnett 62-63.
17. Paul Radin, The Trickster. 1956. (Westport, CT: Greenwood P, 1965): 142.
18. Radin 143.
19. Radin passim.
20. Robert Weimann, Shakespeare and the Popular Tradition in the Theater. 1967. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1978): chapter two.
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22. MacDonald 127-28.

CHAPTER 2 FOLLY IN MADNESS

Fathers and Sons: Ritual and Metadrama

The reunion of Gloucester and Lear, the discarded fathers, one blind and one mad, forms what I consider to be the "heart" of Lear's mad scene and certainly provides not only a re-evaluative recapitulation of many of the play's most important themes but, within the scene, a dramatic climax in its own right. If this reunion forms the crux of the mad scene, in order fully to contextualize Lear's madness we must also develop Gloucester's situation leading into this reunion of fathers. The brief denouement of the "Dover Cliff" sequence of course forms the immediate performative context into which Lear enters, but it also marks something of a climax to the progress or development of Gloucester himself, who seems to have "peaked" as a character, declining into overt passivity while he unburdened is carried about and about to death, prevented from dying at Oswald's hand and saved rather for Edgar's. But Gloucester does have two fine "moments" after his salvation at "cliffside," one being what we might deem his "silent swansong" in 5.2 where our final emblem of him is that of a solitary blind man seated at the base of a stage column, cocking his head and straining to interpret the hideous clamor of offstage battle. It is a remarkable emblem of suspense itself, and of the audience's

own hermeneutic limitations, painfully relevant in a play which so regularly denies us conventional consolations and thwarts our aroused expectations. Gloucester's other "moment" after his salvation at Cliffside is his reunion with Lear in which once again the blind man's sustained, visible straining to interpret events, in this case Lear's mad discourse, mirrors our own extraordinary difficulty in even reacting to Lear's performance. We find it difficult to think of our sensory advantage, our visual perception of the spectacle of Lear's performance, as providing us any comprehension of Lear beyond what is audibly available to Gloucester. In fact, we suspect that Gloucester by virtue of his intense concentration upon the word of Lear might actually hear better than we. Being "known" by Lear, engaging the mad king in something like genuine dialogue, Gloucester is taken into Lear's confidence and even becomes in effect a "pupil" whom Lear persists in trying to teach. Lear has a message for Gloucester which the one struggles to deliver and the other to receive. We cannot help but think that if Gloucester can receive Lear's message, then we can receive it, and thus we devote considerable attention to Gloucester's own interpretive enterprise. In this sense the blind man is our guide. Gloucester's response to Lear is far more subtle and complex than that of Edgar, our displaced guide whose consistent handwringing is rendered ineffectual by the immediate subversion of his every choric remark. Gloucester's

"moment" then consists of his being the privileged audience to one of the most astonishing scenes in Shakespearean drama, of bearing the burden of responding to this side-piercing sight in his few lines of dialogue which wield exquisite pain economically--before being relentlessly reduced by Lear to tears and then to the status of mere stage prop, a spent, discarded father to be lugged about by his heir until killed offstage.

Because an analysis of Lear's 4.6 mad scene must include adequate consideration of Gloucester's role within it, we need to examine the "Dover Cliff" sequence at the outset of the scene which comprises the dramatic context into which Lear enters. But in order to examine this sequence adequately we must first consider something of the nature of the performative and the symbolic "covenants" established between blind man and mad man, father and son, for the sources of which we must turn briefly back to 4.1 and the reunion of Edgar and Gloucester.

Throughout the play the stage is repeatedly being occupied by unpredictable, suspense-engendering characters who are apt at any moment to burst into violent action, whether comic or terrible. We recall Lear, Kent, Gloucester, Cornwall, the Fool, and Poor Tom all erupting into rage and curses, frenzy or song. There is nearly always some such character onstage to disrupt order, keeping the play's social order always near the brink of chaos, denying the audience

any relief from suspense, and especially in the mad scenes radically rupturing the very narrative progression of the play. One character seldom recognized by critics as continually suspense-inducing and even threateningly disruptive is the blinded Gloucester. From his entrance in 4.1 he is reeling vertiginously and thus already visually setting up his climactic fall later in 4.6. His eyes are covered, emphasizing his urgent danger. When he rejects the Old Man's offer of help in 4.1, we see immediately that the reeling blind man needs a guide to prevent his self-destruction.

Edgar establishes himself in 4.1 as an unreliable guide from the very moment of Gloucester's entrance. He opens the scene with a soliloquy typically, for the play as a whole, unrevealing (i.e., merely expository or choric), in which he proclaims himself "to be worst," to be "the lowest and most dejected thing of Fortune" (3). He sees his present wretchedness as a refuge, his presented nakedness as his very source of protection, a paradox he clings to despite Lear's observation on the relative strengths of rags and a pigmy's straw. Yet Edgar has indeed outfaced the winds and persecutions of the sky, for the storm has passed (aimed as it presumably was at Lear), and thus Edgar can leave behind the hovel and greet the brave new windy day: "Welcome then, / Thou unsubstantial air that I embrace. / The wretch that thou hast blown unto the worst / Owes nothing to thy blasts" (6-9). He is debt-exempt, being a beggar, and though or even

because he is naked, entirely self-sufficient. But when he sees what the wind blows in--his father, poorly led and no more eyed--youth, once again burdened by the old, no longer stands in esperance but sinks in despair: "World, world, O world! / But that thy strange mutations make us hate thee, / Life would not yield to age" (10-12). Gloucester is indeed a strange mutation, a mutilation who makes the young man, full of life, hate life--for long enough at least to yield once more to age. Even naked on a new day Edgar is not free, and though escaping his father's attempts to murder him, he is burdened now with killing him.

He more immediately as audience to this new spectacle embraces yet another of this play's mutations and incurs the burden of response. Spectacle in King Lear is never gratuitous, or more precisely, never static, developed carefully as if it were plot, some necessary question of the play, which it is. But we, the offstage audience, regularly have our responsive function short-circuited, appropriated by an onstage representative who interprets as though in our stead. Edgar finds his freedom soon subverted by this demand to respond, and complains that even the form of his response is compulsory: "[I] must play fool to sorrow" (Q1: "the foole"), "and yet I must" (38, 53). Edgar would lurk rolelessly in the hope of finding an opportunity to re-enter the play's mimesis on terms to his own advantage. But his rolelessness does not guarantee him a return to laughter, only to

exquisite folly. And Edgar is also hoist with his own puerile consolatory trope, "the worst," which suddenly removed reveals a void beneath ending presumably in another false bottom, like that of Milton's Satan--"in the lowest deep a lower deep / Still threatening to devour me opens wide," like the vertiginous vista of reduction from "Dover Cliff," like the play's frequent sudden removal of the comic to reveal the terrifying. Edgar's effort to superimpose upon his own fear a "return to laughter" suddenly gives way as a new version of "the worst" appears and intensifies the spectacle of suffering in the play.

As already suggested, Edgar is not a reliable guide, not for the audience, even though he stands in privileged relation to us, wielding asides in greater quantity and variety (choric, expository, confidential, and as Tom, metadramatic) than any other character. Yet his proffered perceptions and summations are routinely undermined immediately by various incursions of stage-reality. But it is not only his perpetual naivety and unreliable commentary which defamiliarize his intimacy with us, it is his fundamental selfishness: his constant, puerile self-analysis; his inability to confront the possibility of his own guilt, as when he reacts to his unfortunate killing of his father with the parenthetical "O fault!" (which the other son, Albany, apparently deems sufficient self-abasement); and an imperviousness to disaster which belies his rhetorical hand-wringing, as when at play's

end he describes the catastrophe as "this sad time," rather less eloquent than his recent account of his own tribulations. Well may we sympathize with Edgar's mimetic plight, but he is never more than an intruder in the metadramatic and hermeneutic margins of the play where we are so often stranded.

The blinded Gloucester's entrance immediately after Edgar's bracing self-avowal initiates a long series of events which continually undermine Edgar's reliability as a guide, for the audience or for Gloucester. We must recall that at the opening of 4.1 Edgar offers us hoped-for hope, false though much desired, a breath of fresh air proving unsubstantial. We have just witnessed a grisly act of graphic cruelty as Cornwall crushes Gloucester's plucked-out eyeballs beneath his heel. Edgar, our hero (by default, or rather by convention, by dramatic function), enters thrice promising us that we have seen "the worst" and so inaugurating what might be seen as the tragicomic upturn of the fourth act. Yet when the mutilated Gloucester enters, we realize that Edgar is only now experiencing what we already know, and in encountering what for him alone is a new shock, he loses the very hope he has just offered us. And this is the crux of Edgar's failure as a guide, to us if not to Gloucester: though functionally the hero, emerging at the proper time to slay villains that the right may thrive, Edgar is always a step behind us in his emotional and moral perceptions of events.

Only after he has led us to believe in Gloucester's impending suicide does he tell us he is only "trifling" with Gloucester's despair--subverting our relief and detaching us ironically from his game. Only after Gloucester swoons does Edgar realize that "thus might he pass indeed" from his profound death wish. Only offstage and after we are less concerned does he reveal himself to his father. He prematurely proclaims Lear's madness a "side-piercing sight," neither as timely or keen as Gloucester's "I see it feelingly." He "would not take this from report," as if he needs an intermediary to be deceived about reality. He summarizes Lear's prophetic frenzy as "reason in madness," asserting that Lear's message is wise while actually dismissing it. If Gloucester is set up for a fall, so is Edgar--as our guide. For soon enough Lear will appropriate the penultimate privileged relationship with the audience, becoming at last the player-king, our guide and Gloucester's into whatever message the play does or does not deliver.

And yet we are relieved when Edgar becomes Gloucester's guide, not only because of the false hopes which he extends us, particularly that of a formal reunion of father and son, but also because of Gloucester's immediate danger, conveyed in a performative routine which demands an assistant, a straight man, and which in its fascinating spectacle convinces us of the necessity of Edgar's mysterious compulsion to "play fool to sorrow." Gloucester's dominant stage movement

is that of a blind man reeling dangerously and unpredictably--a source of continual suspense which points initially and persistently toward his subsequent fall. To emphasize his blindness and, in fact, to create any suspense at all, Gloucester's eyes must be covered (that is, he must be blindfolded) so that in performance the audience is persuaded that the actor really cannot see and hence could really fall, or could really surprise his fellow actors with some unrehearsed movement disrupting mimesis. The maximum exploitation of the routine, vicariously inducing vertigo in the audience, requires the blindfolded actor often to skirt the edge of the stage and appear in real danger of falling off. The more effective his seduction of the stage edge, lingering over the void, the more convincing the efficacy of Edgar's production of a miracle--the more vertiginous his cliff description, the more credible and sympathetically shared Gloucester's swoon and fall and subsequent death-like stillness.

Thus Gloucester must enter blindfolded, wearing either a bandage wrapped around his eyes and head, or possibly twin eye patches, if we take the servant's bandage (described in Q1) of "flax and white of egg" to be a plaster "daubed" on the wound and represented by plaster patches cupped over the eyes. Either arrangement both conveys the impression that Edgar is playing Blind-Man's Bluff with his father and permits a spectacular unveiling to come later in 4.6, and each has its own advantages as prop or as visual referent (e.g., a

bandage removed can serve as a handkerchief, or patches might provide a visual ground for the phrase, a "case of eyes"). Either blindfold (I use this term to include both bandage and patches) still requires ointment and blood oozing out at its edges, or possibly red spots or rings "seeping through," in order to sustain the mimetic illusion and to prevent the device from degenerating into burlesque. And it is precisely here that Edgar proves useful, squandering his privileged status as platea-commentator, yet displaying a grief properly mimetic which sustains the representation of the father/son relation, the only real "leash" restraining Gloucester, who is as eager to self-destruct as is the mimesis of the play, the latter being rescued from meaningless madness and gratuitous cruelty by the very tragicomic upturn inaugurated in this father/son reunion.

This father/son relation is both highlighted and subverted, that is, it is defamiliarized, by the overriding inversion of roles between Gloucester and Edgar, for the child becomes the father of the "madman." Gloucester's first line in 4.1 bears striking resemblance to Poor Tom's first line in 3.4: "Away, get thee away" (15). Rather than the traditional gloss of a resigned or bitter delivery, the line may well be an urgent warning, the speaker agitated and distracted as though mad with grief and despair. And also like Tom's first lines, Gloucester quickly moderates his tone--"good friend, be gone"--and recedes into pathos and compassion.

But for an instant Gloucester shocks us, as the mutilated do, and seems either potentially violent if agitated, like Poor Tom, or else a catalyst of ritual, like Titus's Lavinia, in this the theater of cruelty. We appear to have the latitude to enhance the parallels between Gloucester's entrance here and Poor Tom's earlier. If we follow Q1, Gloucester enters as Edgar's speech concludes with "yield to age" (12), the timing of the entrance equating Gloucester with the "age" to which life (that is, youth) will yield, led by an Old Man, who pleads to be his guide. At "Away, get thee away," Gloucester breaks away from the Old Man (Morality figure of Repentance) in a noli me tangere not of the glorified son but of the contemn'd father (echoed in 4.6 by Lear's "Let me wipe it first"). However, if we follow F1, in which the entrance occurs after "Owes nothing to thy blasts" (9), Gloucester might blow in not led but followed by the Old Man: "Enter Gloucester and an Oldman." Symbolically, Poor Tom was followed by a fiend, Gloucester by a friend, Repentance, whom he spurns in order to follow the demon Despair. Performatively, the Old Man's following Gloucester, trying to govern the desperate man, becomes something of a chase scene which effectively displays a mutilated man reeling recklessly, who has no way and therefore wants no eyes, but will stumble without them as well. As with Tom earlier, the initial effect is a complex of comedy, pathos, and visual shock. With either text, the major performative point conveyed is

that Gloucester unattended, without physical guidance, is physically unstable--weaving, disoriented, and self-destructive. Gloucester's reckless despair thus established, he may become rapidly becalmed once he resolves to die, as "I have no way" evolves into "th'way toward Dover." Here he may convey craft, the blind man thinking to dupe the idiot into helping him die, or an even more cynical resolve, thinking simply to bribe him. But even when taken by the arm ("Give me thy arm"), it is as though he is led on a leash, restrained, not pacified. Watching Gloucester, we continually dread his fall.

Our dread is both engendered and exploited by that curious fusion of the metadramatic and the ritualistic which impels so much of the play and is especially prominent in 4.6. The metadramatic component is emphasized in Edgar when he assumes the role of commentator and when he resurrects Poor Tom--"fool to sorrow"--and in Gloucester to the extent that his blinded recklessness is unpredictable and potentially burlesque. The ritualistic component is highlighted in two ways, first by the spectacle of sacrificial mutilation, for we witness together the naked mortified madman and the blinded banished traitor who by their graphic mutilations are both "known to be contemn'd" and therefore marked for death, as scapegoat and as criminal, as victims of the gods' wrath and of the Prince's; and second, by Gloucester's growing dignity as he resolves to die, "staging" his own ceremonial

death which is preempted by Edgar's redemptive metadramatic transfiguration of ritual. Both metadrama and ritual inhere in the transactions between Edgar and Gloucester and seem to originate in the covenant the two make before even talking to one another when they later formalize this covenant via the theatricality of bartering--"Know'st thou the way to Dover?" (54). The passage where this covenant originates (32-39) merits quoting in full, and then we shall examine it in terms first of ritual, then of metadrama.

Glou. I'th'last night's storm I such a fellow saw
Which made me think a man a worm. My son
Came then into my mind; and yet my mind
Was then scarce friends with him. I have
heard more since:
As flies to wanton boys are we to th'Gods;
They kill us for their sport.

Edg. How should
this be?
Bad is the trade that must play fool to
sorrow
Ang'ring itself and others. Bless thee,
master!

The ritual component consists of the transactions which effect the transfer of power and authority from the father to the son. Gloucester's son is conveniently bifurcated into the good son and the bad son, who wage something of a familial Psychomachia for the soul (and the title) of their father. They are the same son in that both in effect "kill" and then displace the father. These two are quite interchangeable, at least to Gloucester, and equally necessary for the ritual to be accomplished; the good half will, in a ritual murder (or metadramatic "interlude"?), sublimate the

bad half only after the father is dead, the dirty work done. Early on Gloucester has "imagined" that his son intends to kill him, but even if the legitimate has in his mind found an idle and fond bondage to the aged scion, only a villain would actually conceive his murder. The father is terrified that the son wishes him dead and reacts furiously, disinheriting him and pursuing him to kill him. The Bastard, loudly protesting conflicting loyalties, betrays his father to a "dearer father" (Cornwall) with the authority to destroy the father and invest the bastard in his place. The legitimate son pleads necessity--he "must" daub it further and lead his father to his death to atone for his sins, not only for the sin of attempting to murder him, but for fathering the bad son in the first place.

It is in the passage quoted above that Gloucester first expresses his death wish. Having, so far as he knows, passed on his estate, his title, and his role, the discarded father has nothing left to do but, involuntarily unburdened, to die. In fact, he himself is the burden, upon the living, the Old Man whom he warns away from himself as might a leper ("get thee away!"), consenting to be led off to death only by one equally unclean, "such a fellow" as one might think "a worm." Gloucester recalls having seen this beggar "i'the last night's storm," who reminded him of his son, but not only because of Gloucester's physiognomic observation. For in light of that striking subliminal juxtaposition--"a man a

worm. My son"--we can discern something of the reductive contempt essential to the death-struggle. Not only does the (phallic) worm connect the man and the son, but it belongs to that network of eels, wantons, and "things" which image the detached and self-willed phallus, which the naked idiot and mad "trickster" lugs about in ignorance, which the servingman (or adulterer) wields in destructive sport, and which the father passes on to the son. "My son / Came then into my mind." In entering the father's mind (as he entered the sleeping Kent's "dream" during the 2.3 interlude) the son finds himself in enemy territory. It is, after all, in the mind--that dark and vicious place--where the father and the good son kill one another (but in the body where fathers engender bad sons, where bad sons steal phalluses, etc.). But Gloucester is not only remembering the beggar in that mnemonic "place" where his son resides, he is also recalling his reminiscence upon that occasion, regretting his self-pitying lament for Absalom, who rebelled against the kind father and so destroyed himself.

Gloucester "has heard more since," that he has destroyed the good son (now playing Saul to David) and prospered the bad, who has now killed him. Now in remembering this remembrance, but having heard of his terrible guilt since, he gets the idea for his suicide from the son in his mind, who shows Gloucester that he "wants" eyes, even the eyes of this naked fellow, to guide him. If his blaming of the Gods is a

whoremaster's evasion, his sententia ("As flies to wanton boys . . .") more importantly expresses his resignation before the irresistibly advancing new order, his willingness to be killed and replaced by the son. His "we" is no doubt the fathers, whose part the gods have decidedly not come down to take. Rather, the gods who act are the gods of the young, the chthonic struggle being like that in The Oresteia occasioned by the sins of the fathers and eventuating in the new order which grants only a token recognition and subordinate role to the old gods. It seems clear that the boys who joy in killing are equated with the father-killing gods. These boys are wanton (lively and playful) and gain sport from killing fathers, as fathers do from "making" boys by playing the Servingman. And where "wanton" belongs to that network of phallic references, "boy" is most often employed by Lear in addressing his Fool (though it is also used twice to refer to Edmund the treacherous; one is "mad to trust a boy's love"). The Fool in turn, like any boy, is the phallic initiate, plying "the trade which must play fool to sorrow" until the bereft declining father dies and the boy can wield his phallus like a man. Gloucester, recognizing the naked fellow as a surrogate son, in these lines has assigned Edgar the role as his guide and deathsman. He will even insist that Poor Tom be arrayed so that Gloucester alone will be "known to be contemn'd" and hence marked for death. Edgar claims that he "must" play this role, as though a force

stronger than he (i.e., the new gods) compels it, as though not to play it will anger "itself and others," will anger both the son and rightful heir and also the Gods. It is up to the actor to assure that we the audience "feel" this compulsion if we do not understand it. We "feel" it ritually, in the necessary exchange between fathers and sons. It can be "explained" only metadramatically: Edgar apologizes on the ground that he is simply following the script.

This brings us to our second mode of analysis. If ritually the pairing of Gloucester and Edgar can be seen as a covenant between fathers and sons, metadramatically it can be considered as a performative routine between a blind man and a madman. Edgar "resists" his part in such a routine, at first on mimetic grounds. Having luxuriated in the freedom of the voyeur, playing the wanton role of audience to the spectacle of the blind man who avoids and shoos away the Old Man, Edgar is suddenly challenged by the Old Man and forced to respond: "How now! Who's there?" (23). Even as his body resembles and begins enacting Tom, the voice remains Edgar's: "O Gods! / Who is't can say 'I am at the worst'? / I am worse than e'er I was" (24-26). His appeal to the gods is ritually a protestation to the deities who force him to be "worse" by escorting his father to death, but metadramatically it may be a reference to the audience, we who watch but do nothing. We should recall that Edgar is positioned on-stage in a privileged relation to us, I suggest at a down-

stage corner, whence he confides to us. He well could return to this privileged site periodically to perform his choral duties; and perhaps when "walking" his father about the stage perimeter in 4.6, while the blind man repeatedly comes comically close to stepping over the stage-edge, Edgar might nod and wink to us confidentially as he passes over this special spot, the locale of the platea-commentator. But upon being challenged, whatever vigorous unity Edgar, emancipated from the now discarded Poor Tom, has had in body and voice dissipates before this new "worst." His body and voice now are split between Poor Tom and Edgar, wild phallic body and noble mind, as he laments, "I am worse than e'er I was," mechanically resuming his contortions. Edgar emphasizes his reluctance to become Poor Tom again by not answering the Old Man's questions, and by not approaching the others until Gloucester himself summons him.

But his most overt protestations against his role occur in (metadramatic) asides, especially in that aside following Gloucester's verbal reaction to the naked fellow in his mind (his intent to commit suicide): "How should this be? / Bad is the trade that must play fool to sorrow, / Ang'ring itself and others" (36-38). Though the referent of "this" is elusive, it seems generally to refer to Gloucester's desperate plight, to his despair concerning his plight, and more specifically, given the lines that follow, to Edgar's own new performative relation to Gloucester, his role as fool to a

desperate master. This trade--stage player--is bad when it is forced to present so vile a strange mutation, so degraded a son and father. Such a trade angers "itself and others," here not the mimetic son and Gods, but actor and audience, who all recoil from this spectacle which will further plumb the depths of Edgar's "worst." Typically careful to exonerate himself, Edgar exploits his privileged relation to the audience, apologizing twice for his compulsory return to Poor Tom, for his unsavory service to his father, for the potential indecorous burlesque to which he is assenting. With such a reservation, Edgar works up to a command performance of Poor Tom, for which Gloucester tosses him a purse--a better "house" than Tom had last time.

An Obedient Father

We now are ready to examine Edgar's and Gloucester's interaction in 4.6 in the so-called "Dover Cliff" scene, which establishes the performative context into which Lear enters mad. Father and son, blind man and madman, enact four basic movements which all are fundamentally metadramatic--their staging and enacting foregrounded--but each of which is structured upon one or more rituals: the pilgrimage, or the procession to execution; the confession, or the swindling of the blessing; the mock death; and the resurrection, or the exorcism (ironically the genuine shriving for death).

Edgar resolves his discomfort with maintaining the Poor Tom persona by shedding it completely, for he can lie effect-

ively only by speaking rationally. He seems to be daubing it rather well now, which leads us to suspect that his inaugural disclaimers about playing the fool to sorrow were not so much apologies for the continued self-degradation of enacting Poor Tom as justification for the efficacious production of spectacle. During the first ten lines of the scene Edgar and Gloucester argue about their whereabouts and about Edgar's identity. Our alternatives for their stage movement are to have them stroll about calmly, which emphasizes the enormity of Edgar's fraudulence, or to have Gloucester still reeling unpredictably, restrained by Edgar while the latter mimics "labour." This more actively mimed movement, of the staggering pilgrim and the climbing guide, supports Edgar's forthcoming inducement of vertigo and Gloucester's susceptibility to it, creates its own comic and pathetic suspense, and buys the pair time to perambulate a good distance onstage. Their most spectacular and metadramatic option for traversing the stage is to circle the stage perimeter, Gloucester periodically "slipping" at stage-edge, and Edgar while restraining him making eye contact with the audience. Otherwise, they might make several tighter circles, probably three of them, a movement which emphasizes the ritual element in general and alludes to the game of Blind Man's Bluff in particular. The ritual underpinning of the episode is either that of the pilgrimage, conveyed if Edgar has a staff and sandals, which suggests Gloucester's imminent healing, or else the proces-

sion to execution if Edgar bears himself like a sheriff, which suggests Gloucester's imminent death. The other major performative feature to note is the highlighting of Gloucester's perceptual framework, not just his sensory limitations and how his interlocutors adapt to them, but his own capacity for intense concentration upon the word. His isolation from events, his dependence upon interpreting speech, and his ability to concentrate without visual distraction, all contribute to the authority he gains to become our own guide to perceiving and interpreting the mad Lear.

The second movement is more physically static and occurs at the point defined as cliff's-edge. Edgar's famous description of the view from the cliff is enhanced in its effect upon Gloucester if he has all along appeared unsteady on his feet, especially when he changes places with Edgar-- "Set me now where you stand" (4.6.24)--dying in his son's place, as the natural course of time would dictate. As Gloucester assumes his place at cliff-side, the effect is all the more ritualistic if he approaches as if to the scaffold in the public ceremony of execution. But the other ritual structure of the episode is that of Edgar's swindling the blessing from the blind patriarch, echoing Jacob's deception of Isaac, which Shakespeare had earlier parodied with Gobbo and Old Gobbo in The Merchant of Venice. Edgar patently tricks Gloucester, overcoming his expressed suspicions, and is rewarded with the scrotal purse containing the (family)

jewel, which is specially blessed by the father--"fairies and Gods prosper it with thee!" (29-30). He then receives the formal blessing prayed before and to the Gods, just prior to Gloucester's attempted suicide: "If Edgar live, O, bless him!" (40). The two bid farewell, and in response to the fall Edgar makes a striking remark on Gloucester's willingness to be bereft: "And yet I know not how conceit may rob / The treasury of life when life itself / Yields to the theft" (42-44). The juxtaposition suggests that Edgar has stolen something valuable from a willing victim, the favored (good) son meriting his due by his display of wit.

The third movement is the shortest, Gloucester's climactic throwing forward, which is probably enacted with a one-two-three motion of two feints and then a faint, for Gloucester might swoon in the act of falling forward, helping render his subsequent credulousness credible. This fainting is in accord with the continual vertiginous stage movement as well as with Edgar's speech, and it also explains Gloucester's deathlike stillness after the fall. If he is on his knees center stage, the representation is furthered of the ritual execution. An intriguing move might be for Edgar to position Gloucester downstage, near the extreme verge of the stage itself. As Ralph Berry remarks, "there must be a chance, one to draw the audience's soul out of its body, that Gloucester will fall off the cliff--and into the crowd."¹ Gloucester (standing?) addresses as gods the audience, here-

tofore impassive spectators or petty voyeurs. He both indicts and pardons or at least submits to our "great opposeless wills" which insatiably devour spectacle and have driven him to this extreme. Having teased us before by hanging out over the stage-edge, held only by the dubious support of Edgar's grasp, Gloucester on the third feint leans out, and like any talented clown, looms impossibly far out over the audience before tumbling backwards or to one side, collapsing along the stage's edge. For this option we might take as a literal stage direction what Jan Kott perhaps means figuratively: "Gloucester's suicide . . . is only a somersault on an empty stage."² Such an enactment of his fall, so heavily imbued with folly and metadrama, makes of Gloucester a fool-figure whom Lear will be compelled to upstage.

The final movement is the longest and commences with Gloucester's waking up, like Lear in 4.7 far preferring annihilation to more of life. What convinces Gloucester of having fallen is not Edgar's enthusiastic rhetoric, mimicking his earlier cliff description, but his simple entreaty, "Do but look up." This reminds Gloucester of his "great affliction" and of his incapacity to shake it off. He now evinces little trouble believing that he has fallen and survived; in fact, he believes he has fallen precisely because he has survived: "Is wretchedness deprived that benefit / To end itself by death?" (61-62). Gloucester has been swindled, tricked, and it is now up to the wanton boy to justify the

ways of (the new) gods and to rescue the miracle. Edgar takes Gloucester by the arm and helps him up, though he would rather remain prone as if nearer death, and his new guide exploits Gloucester's conviction that he has been tricked: "This is above all strangeness. / Upon the crown o'th'cliff what thing was that / Which parted from you?" (65-67). There is a "subliminal" image here of phallic transfer--and certainly Gloucester's moral healing encompasses the purging of his "snuff and loathed part of nature" (39)--as the fiendish trickster skulks away from the gulled old man. With Edgar's question the naked fellow comes then into his mind, and with him, presumably, sons, worms, and wanton boys. Gloucester replies less curtly and more carefully than his wretchedness would lead us to expect, for his suspicions have been aroused: "A poor unfortunate beggar" (68), whom he rewarded richly to lead him here. Edgar terrifies Gloucester by revealing the beggar to have been "some fiend," but pronounces Gloucester a "happy father" whose part the (old?) gods have taken. The bad son is now the fiend himself, who tried to kill him but has been prevented by the gods who still love old men. Gloucester has been vindicated both in his aural perception of his "better spoken" guide and in his role as father, escaping the son's attempt to murder him. The happy father has had the bad son exorcised from his mind, purging that dark and vicious place.

Replying to Edgar's revelation of the fiend's attempt on his life, Gloucester is exhilarated:

I do remember now; henceforth I'll bear
 Affliction till it do cry out itself
 "Enough, enough," and die. That thing you speak of
 I took it for a man; often 'twould say
 "The fiend, the fiend": he led me to that place
 (75-79).

The first observation to make here is that Gloucester in his exhilaration becomes the child again, zealously reinterpreting recent experience as though for the approval of his new guardian, who patiently indulges his awkward enactments. In his first sentence he parrots the parental pronouncement, and then invents a persona, the enemy Affliction whom he defeats with a bravado resembling that of Lear who in a moment subdues a "giant." After such a boast, he fawns excitedly in his exhilarated enlightenment, producing another persona, Poor Tom, or perhaps the Fiend himself. As Edmund had to temper Gloucester's overreaction to the discovery of Edgar's villainy, so Edgar tries to moderate this enthusiasm which highlights the irony of Gloucester's deception. But on the ritual level, this return to childhood reinforces the transfer of authority from father to son. If the good son bears his burdensome father about, he is more dubiously dutiful than Aeneas to Anchises, scarcely allowing his father a meager mouthful of cliches much less revered patriarchal advice. He is awaiting a more convenient time to kill him, before his combat with Edmund, for which he "ask'[s] his blessing," to insure that he has the right on his side before the upcoming trial for the inheritance. (This request for the blessing is either for a formal ratification of what

Edgar has already regained by fraud, or is a blessing "reported" for Albany's benefit--and we should not take this from report.)

The other observation to make here is that Gloucester's dominant trait, his constant contrapuntal movement between extremes, is illustrated not only in his zealous recovery but even, in curious fashion, within his speech itself. Gloucester has in a short span of time careened from despair to ecstasy, and is soon to be plunged again into profound grief and agony in his encounter with Lear. The actor must be masterful in conveying gradations of agitated movement appropriate for the blind old man, from the vertiginous reeling of the reckless suicide, with its moments of comic burlesque as well as of nervous anxiety, to the celebratory fervor of the anointed elect, with its zeal and childish glee. These extremes of response characterize Gloucester, making him an ideal respondent to the mad Lear, and point to the manner of his (reported) death: "his flawed heart . . . 'twixt two extremes of passion, joy and grief, Burst smilingly" (5.3.195-98).

But within Gloucester's speech itself we see a twofold illustration of this continual traversing of extremes. On the one hand, there is the patent disparity between Gloucester's declaration of serene stoicism and the zeal of its delivery. On the other, there is a radical split and even conflict between the personae Gloucester enacts, with Edgar

attempting to "position" him between the two. "Affliction" comes from the gods and provides the "grievous" extreme of passion. The "joyous" extreme comes from "the Fiend": Gloucester's statement about the Fiend includes reference to the fiendish, phallic "thing" which leads one to that dark and vicious vaginal "place." We might think the cry "Enough, enough" to be the Puritan's in the face of temptation or the burden of pleasure, but it is rather the cry of the gods relenting before the masochistic capacities of the pilgrim. Gloucester conquers his punishment by resolving to enjoy it. The fiendish joy of sex has been exorcised, the "thing" passed on to another. The adulterer's thralldom to the phallus is finished, as his ludicrous enactment of the Fiend--a victor's taunt?--attests. The naked fellow with the barely blanketed uncontrollable thing no longer leads him. Gloucester's new guide wishes to place the blind man between phallic joys and the capacious absorption of torment. The extent to which Edgar's monitory "Bear free and patient thoughts" succeeds in tempering Gloucester's extremes determines the degree of stability of the stage situation into which the mad Lear irrupts.

We need make one other observation on Gloucester at the moment just prior to the mad Lear's entrance (we shall describe Edgar below), namely, that he has several significant options for the disposition of his movements as Lear enters. He might be subdued at Edgar's priestlike closure, becalmed

and thus occupying one of his emotional extremes. This serenity seems a mere lull, given both Gloucester's circum-ambulatory past and the immediate destabilizing threat posed by Lear. Gloucester's becoming steady on his feet, "centered" and perhaps even smiling beatifically, is a suspense device exploited by the immediate subversion of Edgar's achieved cure by Lear's entrance. A becalmed Gloucester either is shielded from Lear by Edgar, who interposes his body between the old fathers and monopolizes the role of Lear's onstage audience as long as he can, so that the blind man remains oblivious to Lear's presence until suddenly surprised by it, or else Gloucester all along is aware of the presence of a new figure in the vicinity and cocks his head, listening intently to discover the "trick" of that altered, manic voice. The "oblivious Gloucester" produces suspense by generating and fulfilling our expectation of an inevitable Pillicock shock, whereas the "intent Gloucester," already competing with the choric Edgar to commandeer our attention and influence our interpretation of the ongoing spectacle, produces a different suspense effect, that of the dawning horror of recognition.

The other most intriguing option for Gloucester's stage movement at Lear's entrance is for the blind man still to be delirious with glee and twitching in wooden, spasmodic movements, entirely self-absorbed, muttering to himself and producing new personae unheard by us. This option sustains

Gloucester's characteristic volatility, but more importantly creates yet another astonishing stage tableau, another spectacle to be endured. For Gloucester's turbulent movements are paralleled or even parodied by the mad Lear, which creates both an emblematic reversal and an intensification of the tableau in 3.4, wherein Edgar/Poor Tom, the banished son and mutilated madman, found himself between two patriarchal interlocutors. Here, the restored son and inevitable heir is caught between two discarded fathers, two raving "strange mutations." The doubling of the manic figures intensifies and complicates the spectacle in that the one figure is blind and (in effect) mute, the other hallucinating and loudly voluble. The mad hero thus is visibly echoed by the subplot's more pallid protagonist, the one discarded father furiously vengeful, the other a manic martyr. Between them is the heir, formerly possessed by fiends and dispossessed by fathers, now patiently choric while waiting to come of age.

This tableau helps to prepare the stage for the ritual transaction to follow: the transfer of Gloucester from one guardian to another. We recall how earlier the banished (good) son found a new patron in Lear, even as the bad son simultaneously finds a dearer father in Cornwall. In 4.6 the blinded Gloucester now is as ward to the son, who in his turn will "Pass" out of the way so that Lear may approach, "pardon that man's life," and adopt his cause. The element of ritual transaction is best emphasized by a vigilant Edgar

with reluctance or trepidation giving over his father (hence risking his just-accomplished cure) to the madman, and emphasized as well by a Gloucester who is relatively passive and thus more obviously an object of exchange. The logical extension of such a character enactment would require Edgar's brief rubric to be by itself sufficient to punctuate with monologic closure Gloucester's agitated speech, with the consequence that Gloucester reaches his climax as a character at the very moment of his cure and transformation. Having made his peace with Gods, sins, and son, he will ripen, rot, and burst smilingly, little more than a venerable encumbrance for the young who, burdened, crawl toward life. This version of Gloucester, morally cured and discursively quelled, remains silent and still during the mad Lear's earlier speeches, either submerged in torpor or beatifically becalmed, in each case aroused only by the shock of further revelation, taking him beyond the pain prescribed by Edgar to yet another "worst."

Yet there is a strong counterforce at work against the sense of unity conferred by ritual. The foregrounding of ritual, of a ceremonious exchange of Gloucester from one guardian to another, privileges Edgar's perspective of events and relationships. However, to Gloucester, his interlocutor is only a random and anonymous witness with no inherent didactic authority over him. Only if Gloucester acknowledges this witness as having been sent by the gods themselves does

his interlocutor gain the priestly authority to impose piety and humility upon the pilgrim. While such acknowledgement is a performative possibility, "Gloucester" is equally viable as a self-centered, or at least self-contained, blind old man from whose perspective the miracle is generated as if entirely from within. To the extent, then, that Gloucester remains oblivious to any significant relation with his interlocutor, Gloucester may react to Edgar's moralistic injunction by simply internalizing his ongoing hermeneutic obsession with his own past, continuing to marshall a series of muttering interpretive personae in a self-absorbed performance which continues unabated and in unintelligible isolation. This version of Gloucester remains much more active and obscures the ritual transference of his guardianship by the sheer suspense attending his discovery of Lear's identity and the moment of their encounter. This "active Gloucester" is the one who, through the exuberance of liberation and through the sheer kinesthetic pleasure he discovers in enacting personae, is impelled by the powers and pleasures of performance into the further performed (hence interpreted) re-enactment of his past. This is the Gloucester who, if ever he emerges from the private into the public domain, will be on the verge of breaking out into the performative mode of satire--the succession of typical and topical personae. This is the Gloucester who renders Edgar more diffident in his rubric, who renders less predictable the effects of his spiritual "cure," and who anticipates Lear's forthcoming techniques as a rail-

ing satirist.

Finally, before turning to Lear's mad performance, we should make a few observations about Edgar's situation at Lear's entrance. The main point to make here is that regardless of the degree to which Edgar dominates Gloucester--dominance both in terms of performance (i.e., Edgar's tour de force role-playing) and in terms of their mimetic relationship as characters--Edgar nevertheless remains dependent upon interaction with Gloucester in order to compose a new persona, for Edgar he still nothing is. But before Gloucester can respond to Edgar's moral injunction, which would give Edgar the opportunity to don or else to develop another role, Lear enters, imposing himself on his audiences onstage and off. Edgar is now faced with having to form his persona in relation to the mad Lear. His only options for sustaining with Lear his current interlocutory prominence are to continue as pontifical moralist and "Christian" trickster, proceeding to "deliver" Lear, or to revert to Poor Tom and so speak a dialect of Lear's language. The play's greatest role-player lacks the audacity for either. Edgar by virtue of Poor Tom's discursive vanquishing of Lear already knows that the mad cannot be linguistically manipulated by the sane, nor can he deceive with mime the visually acute Lear. To become Poor Tom again is to ruin his fabricated miracle for Gloucester and, more importantly for this fugitive who still "will escape whiles he can," to risk his discovery by either of the two old men. Thus it is that upon Lear's

entrance, Edgar's stage dominance drastically declines, and the fabricator of miracles is soon relegated to the periphery of stage activity, excluded from Lear's and Gloucester's dialogue and granted only the minor choric function of inducing paroxysms of pathos which are routinely undermined by the vicious irony of immediately ensuing events. We shall withhold comment upon Edgar's nunciatory and choric remarks which "frame" Lear's entrance until below where we examine the performance options for that entrance.

Lear's Resumption of Shape

Like Poor Tom's first appearance, Lear's entrance as a madman is irruptive, shocking, and timed at a critical and emotional moment. And as with Poor Tom's entrance, we once again must decide at which of two points Lear actually comes onstage. The Folio has the stage directions "Enter Lear" at line 80, after "thoughts," while the Quarto delays the entrance ("Enter Lear mad") until line 82, after "thus." We now are in a position to describe a pattern to these entrances of shocking characters distinctive to each text. Poor Tom's 3.4 entrance in the Folio occurs at line 36, after the word "just" which concludes Lear's prayer, so that Tom enters shouting "Fathom and half!" The Quarto has no stage direction to indicate Poor Tom's entrance. The "Fathom and half!" line is not in the Quarto, but the text suggests that Tom enters or makes himself fully visible only when summoned by Kent's "come forth" (line 45). In 4.1 Gloucester in the Folio enters ("Enter Gloucester and an Oldman") at line 9 after

Edgar's encomium ends with "blasts," whereas the Quarto again delays the entrance until after Edgar has both seen and reacted to him: "Enter Glost led by an old man," after "age" (12). Finally, as mentioned above, here in 4.6 the Folio reads "Enter Lear" immediately after Edgar's pronouncement (after "thoughts"), while the Quarto delays the entrance again until after Edgar has had time to see and react to Lear before we see him. The inference we may draw here is that the Quarto generates suspense by announcing the presence of a given shocking figure and then delaying its appearance, whereas the Folio makes more use of sudden visual shock. The Quarto provides an interpretant who influences or even attempts to prescribe our response, the critic's question perhaps being whether the ensuing spectacle conforms to the prescribed expectation or deviates from it; the cumulative effect of persistent deviations would be to undermine altogether the authority of onstage interpretants. If we concur with the school of thought which maintains that the Folio text is a deliberate revision of the Quarto, then we might infer that the entrances were methodically altered so as to exploit the device of immediate visual shock. In each case we have a strange mutation, some mad or mutilated grotesque figure, entering immediately after an emotional declamation which interprets the play's events in terms of conventional morality and consolatory meaning. So in addition to simple visual shock, the Folio revision seems designed consistently

to undermine attempts to ascribe meaning and order to the horrors being experienced. The effect also is to defamiliarize the onstage reactive commentaries which now occur as we "take in" the spectacle. The stage commentator now provides no significantly privileged perspective of the spectacle, and the eventual result of visible horror's being inadequately described or explained verbally is ultimately to privilege the visual emblem over the spoken word. If having onstage interpretants normally relieves us of directly bearing the burden of response to horrifying spectacle, the inefficacy of their attempts to salvage meaning from their *sententiae* leaves us fearful that our "guides" are not as fully cognizant of the horror as we. It is we, then, who must confer meaning upon such horrid spectacle. But our "guides" have already used up the conventional language which gives expression to our emotions. In fact, the word is effectively "drowned out" by the overwhelming "side-piercing sight," spectacle as relentlessly reductive and monologically dominant as was the Storm.

We still need to consider what actually "happens" during Lear's entrance. We assume that like Poor Tom's entrance earlier, Lear's fully exploits the tensions between comedy and pathos, horror and delight, curiosity and repulsion (we shall further consider the generation of these tensions below). Following the Folio, he enters "early" and hence has time to display himself in some fashion before speaking. His

options here are manifold: striding in regally, while his shocking appearance bespeaks his tortured state and belies his royal gait; wandering bemused, lost in private dialogue, a shred of which emerges when he speaks "to us"; capering in, for fun, or dashing in as though pursued. Following the Quarto, he perhaps bursts in after Edgar's premonitory reaction, and if his first lines are themselves drowned out by his own spectacle so that their point is lost, yet the actor retains the resource of exploiting the most immediate reactions of the audience: if they laugh, he does something funny; if they gasp he intimidates them further, etc. I prefer the "early" Folio entrance, which permits the actor to assert himself and establish whatever rapport with the audience and whatever rhythm of enactment he desires. For unlike Poor Tom, who is performing primarily for an onstage audience, Lear clearly has the option to ignore completely the others onstage and to play directly to us. The extra time for Lear's self-display provided by the early entrance also promotes the composing of the tableau of the choric Edgar "caught between" the two manic old men. This tableau not only has immediate impact, but it proves useful for the further unfolding of the scene.

Poor Tom's 3.4 entrance was framed by a stage tableau which extended the spectacle by distributing various reactions onstage, the multiplicity of which provided us with numerous perspectives by which to interpret Tom's perform-

ance. These reactions soon developed into conflicting interpretations which the madman himself completely subverted, imposing something of a discursive Babel until discourse itself was annihilated by the Storm. If our primary interest was in Tom himself, our secondary interest always was in Lear's developing response to Tom. At the mad Lear's entrance in 4.6 the stunning tableau which is created likewise distributes onstage reactions, though between only the two characters, Edgar and Gloucester. We receive immediately Edgar's chorally prescriptive response, but of more abiding interest to us is the suspense generated as we anticipate Gloucester's reaction to the eventual discovery of the speaker's identity. Edgar provides us reductive emotional guidance, but more important is his visual guidance if, as I suggest, he appears torn between the astonishing sight of Lear and his instinctive tie to his father, for whom he fears and whom he wishes to protect from this imminent emotional assault. In looking back and forth--looking mournfully or in astonishment at Lear, worriedly at Gloucester--he directs (as stage manager) our own vision to the impending interaction between the two old men. For Lear himself will eventually become fascinated with Gloucester (with his mutilation, with the problem of performing for a blind man), directing his and our vision upon those mutilated eyes and that face struggling to interpret and respond to his words. Certainly Gloucester comprises Lear's intended or even "destined" audience, and Lear

is determined that Gloucester understand him. There is no interpretive struggle here, certainly not over the madman. Rather, the interpretant becomes the object of interpretation, of Lear's monarchal hermeneutic imposition which is less conventionally moralizing than Edgar's choric monology, expressed instead in a bewildering variety of conventional, experimental, and spontaneous discursive forms.

Before continuing our discussion of the performance of Lear's mad scene, we ought more firmly to establish this gradual progression of Lear's role in the direction of the didactic by considering a rough outline of the rhetorical structure of Lear's speeches in the scene, which creates performative parameters for the Lear-actor. His earliest speeches (and as with Tom we might do well to think of most of Lear's speeches as "set-pieces"), "No, they cannot touch me for coining . . ." (4.6.83-84) and "Nature's above art in that respect . . ." (86ff.), are in the disorganized, disjointed prose of a largely mimed performance much like many of Tom's; where the first madman hallucinated and conversed with demons, giving us tag-ends of dialogue, the second madman performs amid an imagined militia whom he rallies to battle with a giant. Lear's next speech, "Ha! Goneril with a white beard . . ." (96ff.), is still in prose, but is more organized, rhetorically if not in terms of mimetically-accurate chronology, bearing several structures of parallelism and repetition. And it does refer more overtly than the

preceding speeches to details of the play's "history." This speech bears resemblance to that of Tom's Servingman, more distanced and reflective than raging, confessional and yet unreliable because framed by hallucination and marred by occasional inconsistencies, because somewhat unsure of its audience, whether public or private--because, in a way, still prose. But as Lear "warms up" to Gloucester as his audience (or as his theme, or as both), his subsequent speeches, from "Ay, every inch a king . . ." (107) onward, become much more organized, regularly lapsing in and out of verse, and never unmetric for long. Shalom Kahn cautions us to be wary of the editorial procedure, emerging tentatively with the Folio editor and becoming pervasive in the eighteenth century and standard since, of forcibly versifying as much of Lear's speech as ingenuity permits.³ It seems a more accurate reception of the text to describe Lear's mad speeches to Gloucester as fundamentally structured upon verse, weaving in and out of meter. This new style in Lear's speech suggests to me an emergence from the depths of a private dialogue unintelligible to us, to a greater awareness and solicitation of his immediate public audience, to whom his speech is intended to be intelligible and thus, indirectly, intelligible to us as well. The performative "clue" which I infer from this rough sketch of the progress of Lear's rhetoric is that Lear gradually selects or suddenly discovers Gloucester as his audience and desires very much to communicate with him. He would not

only tell Gloucester the truth of madness, he would make him see it, via the (often deictic) word: "Behold," "there," "Read," "mark" (twice), "Look," "see"; "yet you see," "thou hast seen," "thou mightst behold," "seem to see." Clearly Lear is profoundly aware of Gloucester's impediment and of his own performative limitations, and despite his urgency and the persistence with which he attempts to deliver his message, Lear apparently becomes frustrated enough with the impotence of words that he decides to preach the Word--formally and prophetically to declaim his message to Gloucester. The obvious question as to the nature of that message we shall necessarily defer until we are in a better position to address it.

The basic progression of the stage movement of Lear's mad self-presentation resembles that of the rhetorical progression of the speeches in that both proceed from the dispersed and disorganized to the more focused and organized. Lear's earliest stage movement is diverse and symbolic, wide-ranging in its spatial traversal, and in general bears comparison to that so often employed by Tom literally to maintain his distance from others, roving ever at the periphery, deliberately enigmatic, and hence sustaining his onstage alienation while assaulting the offstage audience as well with an interpretive enigma. From manic roving, the stage movement of Lear slows down considerably for his episode of reflective reminiscence, and then Lear gradually "circles"

Gloucester, who forms a "still point" and draws Lear into something of a sculptured tableau, where movement is constrained primarily to the gestural. But the sublimely statelily rhythm of pathos, so eminently exploitable with Gloucester kneeling and the two discarded fathers touching or even on occasion embracing, is frequently punctuated by Lear's drawing back for frenzied (if brief) enactments of didactic mime. Thus like Poor Tom Lear persists in attempting to divulge his urgent message, and accordingly he organizes his enactment, suiting the action to the word and the word to the action, unfortunately tutored by his own discretion. The overall progression of stage movement in Lear's mad scene parallels that of the immediately preceding "Cliff" sequence, which also in its early phase employed wide-ranging and strikingly unusual stage traversal, and in its later phase likewise used an intimate tableau, wherein Edgar gesticulates over the blind old man in an effort to alter and direct his interpretation of events. Hence the interpretive struggle is not that of 3.4, between the sane over the mad, but in subsequent episodes between the son and the mad king over Gloucester the discarded father, valuable to the one as the guarantee of the inheritance, and to the other as a banished comrade (a fellow dispossessed father) and as a subject for a king who not only "lacks soldiers" but lacks a kingdom as well.

Having sketched the general performative parameters of the scene as suggested by the pattern in the progression of

Lear's rhetoric and stage movement, we now must turn to a consideration of the mad Lear's costume and attempt to describe the range of configurative options available for composing the visual spectacle which Lear presents. To begin with, the play's text is virtually silent about the components of Lear's "mad costume," unlike Poor Tom's habilament conveniently described in detail for us by Edgar. The few clear references to Lear's appearance which we do have are for the most part not helpful in reconstructing the costume. There are the choric lamentations, one by Edgar ("O, thou side-piercing sight!" [4.6.85]) and another by the Gentleman ("A sight most pitiful in the meanest wretch, / Past speaking of in a king!" [4.6.201-02]), which form a dolorous frame to Lear's mad performance and attempt to circumscribe it by reducing it to mere pathos, as though denying Lear's performance any discursive validity. The "sight" they both lament is not limited to Lear's physical appearance but comprises as well the broader visual and aural spectacle of mad performance. Of the three references to specific elements of Lear's costume, two are made by the madman himself, one to the gauntlet which he throws down in challenging the "giant" ("There's my gauntlet" [4.6.90]), and the other to boots which he asks Gloucester to assist him in removing ("Pull off my boots. Harder, harder: so" [4.6.171]). We have the prerogative to withhold these items from our Lear's costume if in performance Lear hallucinates, imagines, or otherwise

simply mimes the existence of these items. The only other overt reference to the costume comes from Cordelia, who reports that Lear "was met even now . . . Crown'd with rank fumiter and furrow-weeds . . . and all the idle weeds that grow / In our sustaining corn" (4.4.1-6). We need to examine more closely this our most certain item of apparel.

Some editors have read Cordelia's term "Crown'd" rather loosely and "all the idle weeds" (my emphasis) more strictly, so that the weeds form not only a headpiece, but a garment for the entire body; hence Capell: "Enter Lear, fantastically dressed in wild flowers." By this interpretation Lear resembles nothing less than the Jack in the Green of later centuries, a veritable walking bush. Such a costume would require skillful designing so as not to encumber the actor. But I find it astonishing that a florally-bedecked Green Man would elicit no direct commentary as do Tom's mortified arms and reserved blanket or Gloucester's mutilated eyes. More satisfactory is a floral head dress. It is easy to read Cordelia's description as a "crown of weeds," that is, something woven, whereas the actual phrase, "crown'd with . . . weeds," may be more inclusive, meaning perhaps "covered" or "capped" or "topped." The distinction is significant, the former implying a relative order to the apparel, the latter allowing a more disheveled bedecking. If Lear's head covering is woven, then presumably he himself has woven it, either to fashion some protection from the elements but more likely

as a mad gesture of restoring himself to the monarchy. In either case, the choice of noxious weeds for the weaving materials is ironic. In fact, any deliberately woven crown--ranging from a relatively chaste pastoral wreath to a festive Bacchanalian garland to a Christ-like crown of thorns--may strike the audience as an act by Lear of commentary or self-analysis.

However, Lear's headpiece may be not at all organized. Instead, Lear may have mortified his head as earlier Tom did his arms. Thus rather than a woven crown or wreath, weeds may appear to be randomly and haphazardly stuck in his hair (and in his beard) and wrapped about his head, an image in accord with the recurrent pattern of Lear's abusing his head--pulling out his hair (as reported by Kent), beating at the gate which let his folly in, frequently gripping his temples to shut out madness. This headpiece connotes more violence and savagery and is presumably the result of rage or of deliberate self-abuse. This "mortified" headpiece creates a decidedly more chilling effect, like that of an apparition--like an "animated" version of the foliated head of church architecture which Kathleen Basford suggests represented a lost soul.⁴ In terms of the play, the "mortified" headpiece in effect combines two features of Poor Tom's costume, the elf-locks of the wild man and the mutilated arms of the suicidal lunatic. Tom's arms constitute his only system of defense against the elements and other antagonists,

and thus are appropriate as the locus of attack and as the object to be neutralized. Likewise, Lear's head is his last defense against madness itself and is equally appropriate as the locus of attack--and by his own hands. A final noteworthy implication of such a disordered headpiece is its production of the striking visual metaphor of Lear's head (and hence mind) as an unweeded garden, in this case not the object of external attack but the source itself of poisonous outgrowths. Unless the "mortified" headpiece is overtly floral, then in general it seems more in keeping with the iconography of savagery, madness, and demon-possession, whereas the crown or wreath in general is in accord with the iconography of communal Folly and festivity. Neither iconographic connotation prescribes Lear's performance, since both Shakespeare and the actor/director are free to recombine and alter conventions, but each is conducive to creating a certain set or range of audience expectations which the actor may then proceed to fulfill or violate.

The remaining components of Lear's costume may be 1) derived from costuming traditions developed over the course of the play's stage history, 2) inferred with dubious ingenuity from scattered and indirect textual references, or 3) simply posited and then justified as the means to a given aesthetic end. Marvin Rosenberg notes that the dominant stage tradition has presented a Lear in rags, a costuming spectrum which could range from the merely rumpled to the

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 nearly naked. The middle of the spectrum, a looped and windowed raggedness, can itself convey anything from helpless exposure to self-abasement, recklessness to fugitivism. A number of possible costume elements may be seen to interface neatly with assorted textual references. The conventional accoutrement of rags provides a convenient visual grounding for a passage from one of the mad Lear's speeches which includes the phrases "tattered clothes" (4.6.162 [Q1--"tattered rags"]) and "arm it in rags" (165 [F1 only]). A naked Lear who wears only a blanket or loin cloth has opportunities for gesturally exploiting such a costume at moments such as "i'th'clout, i'th'clout" (92), with the assorted sexual or phallic references, and with "I am not ague-proof" (105) if he deliberately imitates the "Tom's a-cold" of the earlier naked madman. We might likewise detect in the comments of other characters allusions to the mad Lear's costume, as in 4.7 when Cordelia asks Kent to "Be better suited: / These weeds are memories of those worser hours" (4.7.6-7). Here we might well conceive of Cordelia as punning on "weeds," reminding us of Lear's costume from "those worser hours"; reminding us more efficaciously, we could insist (and we could only insist, since we could not marshal compelling logic), the more prominent his display of weeds, in a cape-like mane or a floral body suit. Later in 4.7 Cordelia requests assurances that her father is "arrayed" before she will see him--itself a suggestion that Lear may perform in

near nakedness--to which the Gentleman, the same who earlier deemed the mad Lear a "pitiful sight," replies: "Ay, madam, in the heaviness of sleep / We put fresh garments on him" (4.7.21-22). We might argue that "fresh garments" implies that previously Lear wore soiled ones, that his rags were noticeably filthy, that by extension he was also dirty and begrimed, like Poor Tom. These, then, are examples of vigilance in detecting allusions to Lear's costume and extending upon them. Our final method of determining the costume is simply to prescribe it on aesthetic grounds. Thus we might prefer a naked Lear not so much because of immediate textual references to nakedness but because a naked Lear seems the apotheosis of the nakedness motif in the play, the end result of the "unbuttoning" process begun by Lear during the storm; hence a naked Lear seems willfully to collaborate with his own degradation. Or we might argue for a ragged Lear because we want a Lear who continues to resist his own decline, who retains some solid and immovable core. Thus, we would argue, Lear never did actually "unbutton," being successfully prevented by Kent and the Fool. Rather, the ragged Lear completes the "rags" theme of the play, fulfilling the Fool's prophecy, "Fathers that wear rags, / Do make their children blind" (2.4.46-47). Or we could spurn altogether such reactionary exaltation of the Text and, arguing that the aesthetic "effect in question" (certainly not a "principle at stake") is defamiliarization, which to attain, enter Lear mad

in formal evening attire, or an astronaut suit. (Or dressed in flowers.)

I move now to an explication of the mad scene itself, and ought to mention at the outset of this undertaking several assumptions to which I adhere while proceeding exegetically. The most basic is that Shakespeare would not provide mere pointless gibberish for this the climactic mad scene, for to do so is to squander a number of marvelous dramatic opportunities--opportunities for shocking spectacle, for astonishing stage emblems and tableaux, for a tour de force acting performance, for further developing a character or theme, for providing what Ruth Nevo observes as the fourth-⁶ act ironic re-evaluation of the play's events to that point. I also frequently in my explication opt for the more shocking or untraditional performance alternative, not only to shed new light upon obscure textual passages and, more to the point, to produce a new reading, but because I assume that Shakespeare had a fundamental interest in repeatedly producing a defamiliarizing effect. I acknowledge two schools of thought upon this interest and, I hope, privilege neither. One is a variant of the Brechtian didactic theory of the social function of theater, which would maintain that Shakespeare continually subverts his audience's capacity to respond according to convention or with routinized emotional reactions. I say "variant" because I see the play not as continually short-circuiting our ability to respond emotion-

ally nor even as denying us an emotional response by inundating us with a deluge of conflicting emotions. Rather, the play interminably presents pain without resolution. If it lures us into pat and puerile hopes, it mercilessly dashes them, exhausting our defense stratagems and leaving us either to see the way the world goes from the perspective of madness, or to make leaps of faith off non-existent cliffs. The other way of accounting for this relentless production of defamiliarization is the unabashedly essentialist view that Shakespeare must radically violate the dramatic and literary conventions which govern the theatrical representation of madness in order to transcend them and so 1) to create a more naturalistic representation of madness; 2) to present the heretofore never expressed truth of madness; 3) to plumb unfathomed depths of the human psyche; 4) to create spectacular novelty and so stimulate ticket sales. In the following pages I shall draw on all of the above ideas. My final assumption is naive but fashionable: pathos is an inadequate critical response to madness. Madness must be respected as language, privileged even, as though criticism were obliged to an affirmative action program, when it is really driven by the compulsion to talk. Thus if madness is deemed empowered to deconstruct all interlocutory and analytical discourse, I derive comfort from the recognition that the madness we are considering is literary madness and therefore of necessity madness already organized. We are easily exasperated by

Edgar's benign but repressive response to Lear's madness, but if so, we are too hermeneutically reliant upon a character either trapped in the mimetic level of events or else rendered impotent, I presume deliberately, as a stage commentator. We are left on our own to fathom the literary organization to Lear's madness.

After Edgar announces Lear's entrance, "But who comes here?" (4.6.80), he immediately reacts to Lear's physical appearance: "The safer sense will ne'er accomodate / His master thus" (81-82). The words delivered with emphasis are "ne'er," which conveys the pathos of the discovery, and "thus" with its decorous disgust, uninformative to we critics who, blind as Gloucester, desire more descriptive detail. Usually glossed as "the saner man would not dress as Lear has," Edgar's exclamation can be made to refer more specifically to Lear's headpiece if we assume that the "master" of the "safer sense" is the mind or head, housing all of the cognitive faculties, and if Edgar gestures toward his head while delivering the line. Edgar's use of "will" instead of the subjunctive "would," which we might have expected, is not only emphatic but prescriptive, separating Lear by virtue of his appearance from the possession of reason. Edgar is already inclined to dismiss Lear's speech as gibberish before a word has been uttered. When we additionally consider his expression of premonitory dread of Lear's impending speech--his use of "safer," "ne'er," and "thus"--we can infer Edgar's

current persona: he is still the prescriptive priest of "Bear free and patient thoughts" (although now a monologic intermediary for us, not for another character) but a priest for whom the only miracle now would be to prevent Lear from speaking. Edgar, in pre-diagnosing Lear's speech as meaningless and in predisposing our reception of it as pathos, prematurely imposes monologic finality, which undermines his capacity for engaging madness in dialogue--all before Lear has spoken. For Edgar, sight pre-empts the word. If we seek a guide who responds only to Lear's word, we will have to follow the blind man.

Edgar completes his "frame" of Lear's mad speech with the self-confirming reaction of pathos: "O thou side-piercing sight!" (85). He seizes Lear's initial utterance and attempts to frame it within the context of pathos, without even acknowledging the utterance as a word, only as a "sight," mere sound subsumed to spectacle. Unfortunately for Edgar, his frame is doomed the moment Lear resumes performing, for Lear will woo responses from us other than pathos. If his constraint of this "sight" cannot abide the word (typical of this master of appearances who cannot name anything), if he cannot compete with this sight's self-representation, for that matter he cannot even control our response to the visual element, to the sight itself. For we are not blind like Gloucester. Immediately prior to Lear's entrance, Edgar was creating cliffs ex nihilo for a blind

man. But the moment a real "sight" occurs, our creator/-priest recoils in horror, as though he might exorcise it by reducing it to a pathos that makes speech unable. Edgar's role as guide, priest, hero--as provider of meaning--is for the time completely subverted. But we should observe that Edgar's responsive strategies will change, from the gambit of diffidently echoing Poor Tom ("Sweet marjoram!" [93]), to the act of listening, even if without hearing "Reason in madness!" (173).

The opening lines of Lear's mad performance, "No, they cannot touch me for coining; / I am the king himself" (83-84), may be construed several ways. The phrase "touch me" may mean "compete with me" and be part of a boast of sexual virility or an assertion of the exclusiveness of his royal prerogative to create money. Or "touch me" could be slang for "arrest me," as though for counterfeiting, and be part of a mad fugitive's strategy of resistance. Or "touch me for coining" might refer to the practice of the King's Touch, in which his majesty's subjects would approach their monarch to be touched by him as a cure for scrofula; after the session he would issue a medal bearing his own image. The point of the latter allusion in the dramatic context is that his subjects can no longer touch him because he is an exile, or they can no longer be healed by him because he lacks the power and is sick himself. A final reading of Lear's opening lines comes from the Folio text, usually rejected at this

crux, which reads, "they cannot touch me for crying," which conveys considerable self-pity, potentially maudlin, or potentially prefiguring and heightening Lear's howling entrance with the dead Cordelia.

But the reference to coins cannot be ignored, whatever the text or our reading of it, since other references follow ("there's your press-money" [86-87]) as Lear mimes a military impressment. Both the opening lines and the subsequent impressment are more effectively rendered if Lear has a prop to serve as a visual referent to the audience. He could wield a "real" purse containing "real" money, the irony being that the mad ragged beggar fails to recognize that the money could potentially alleviate his distress. Or he might bear a bag containing some worthless item, idle pebbles for instance, upon which he confers value by the royal touch and fiat. Although the hallucinating of objects on the stage presents an actor the opportunity to display his pantomiming skills, he none the less is apt to leave his audience quite confused and as willing as Edgar to dismiss his speech as mere gibberish. I find controlled confusion preferable and suggest that a real prop confers a wider array of acting opportunities: occasioning a kind of naturalistic meditating (he seriously contemplates his wealth and its power), functioning like the Fool's bauble as an "interlocutor" to whom to address ironic commentary or as an object to display to the audience as illustrative of a speech-point, and inspiring slapstick antics.

In general, critics are agreed that the mad Lear in his first set piece is miming the impressment of military recruits. Yet compared to Poor Tom, whose opening performance imitates the demon which possesses him, such a routine seems tame. How then does Lear's opening mime convey madness? Or more specifically, how does it constitute a "side-piercing sight," madness dangerous and aberrant enough to threaten Edgar, a former madman himself and currently party to a rather grotesque pilgrimage, such that he immediately discerns raving lunacy? Given that Lear's opening lines can carry several connotations, each suggesting a different character mood upon entrance--from manic to funereal, bawdy to paranoid--how are we to decide "which" Lear enters, which form of self-representation the madman employs? I think that the very employment of an opening line so "loaded" with multiple signification is in itself a clue to one of the more viable representational modes available to the performer. But I think too that we can progress toward an answer to this question by posing another.

If we agree that Lear at the outset of his mad performance is miming a troop impressment, the question we might ask is, for whom is he performing? (Conveniently, this permits us as well to describe Lear's stage movement at his entrance and at the outset of his routine.) His performance might be entirely self-contained in the sense that he is oblivious to anyone else and performs exclusively for and among imagined

specters. Thus Edgar and we "just happen" to overhear a part of the routine, snatches of a dialogue from only one of the speakers involved. This performance option is consistent with Lear's habit of muttering, of emerging from obscure dialogues (often he launches into speech by commencing with "No," clearly a sign of continual internal debate), and would mirror the muttering Gloucester if the latter, as suggested above, remains exuberant and zealous after his salvation. But whereas Gloucester is understandably oblivious to an audience, being blind and inhabiting a world only of voices, Lear literally cannot see another character because of the intensity of his hallucination. To convey this level of intensity, this performance option necessitates extreme mania (and rules out funereal self-pity) such that Lear hallucinates a "they" in "they cannot touch me for coining," as he hallucinated dogs and daughters in 3.6, and such that his whirring activity overall resembles Tom's in 3.4. This option also permits dispensing altogether with props, so that Lear identifies objects for the audience only by words. Such an opening mad performance, frenzied and entirely self-contained, defies rather than seduces the audience's interpretive efforts.

If Lear's being unaware of any (non-hallucinated) audience whatever constitutes the first performance option, the second is that Lear performs his opening mad routine for Edgar and Gloucester--before, of course, demanding the pass-

word from Edgar and discovering ("Ha!") Gloucester after having "killed" the giant. If this is the case, Lear contrary to Poor Tom imposes himself upon his audience from the start and presumably impresses them into his army ("There's your press-money"), "forgets" them, and then requires from Edgar the password. Edgar's pained response seems more appropriate if it is compelled, if Lear is forcing Edgar to respond to his madness, all the while denying dialogue. The major theatrical advantage to this option is its provision of a visual referent--Edgar, the impressed soldier--for Lear's enacted attack upon the giant. During the quixotic furor of the attack Lear leaves Edgar's presence and really does forget him, encountering him anew while swaggering in the afterglow of victory. Thus the offstage audience shares Edgar's exasperation at not seeing the objects under discussion or attack and at not being able to predict Lear's behavior. Edgar's bewilderment might thus simply prefigure Gloucester's, the blind man being Lear's next audience, one whom he leaves equally confused. This replication of episodes of passive bewilderment in response to the performance of madness is literarily neat, but it conspires to the cumulative stage response of pathos and of the continued exclusion of the audience from following Lear into this the nadir of the play. The disadvantage if Lear's mad speech is performed as an assault upon a bewildered Edgar is that our perception of Lear's madness is made to resemble Edgar's,

since we know no more than he and possess no interpretive independence. This means that our response is likely reduced to bewildered pathos.

The final option for the constitution of the mad Lear's audience for his opening set piece is that Lear performs directly for us, the offstage audience. This is the option which I wish to pursue in detail, in part because to my knowledge such an interpretation has not been put forth, and in part because the privileging of Lear in relation to us induces us to follow him more closely, to make more sense of him than does Edgar, to leave Edgar behind as our guide and strike out, as it were, on our own. Privileging Lear, we share his perspective of the other characters who lack the madman's wisdom, and we share Lear's exasperation rather than Edgar's that others cannot follow him. And yet we too are unable to follow him, though we wish to know more than Edgar apparently does. Our hermeneutic position roughly corresponds to that of Gloucester.

If Lear performs directly to the offstage audience, then he and Edgar become, perhaps only briefly, rivals for the privilege of confidant to the audience. Thus Lear assumes a position at the stage perimeter whence he tosses money and recruits audience members, while Edgar from another stage position, possibly nearer the central mimetic locus (but wherever the miracle was fabricated), appeals to a different physical sector of the audience to share in his own response

to Lear. I suggest that Lear actually "works" the crowd by circling the stage perimeter, adopting much of both the performative mode and the metadramatically-privileged relation with the audience belonging to the stage clown of the Elizabethan theatrical tradition. We have, then, a theater house divided, between Edgar mopping and mowing his displays of anguish from a stationary stage location, beckoning mutely and impotently, and Lear, circling the perimeter of the stage more visibly and in more intimate proximity to the theater audience. While Edgar appeals to the audience for an emotional reaction to the scene on a mimetic level, Lear upstages him by appropriating both the performative audience-intimacy afforded the Clown and the metadramatic distancing from the mimetic stage action afforded the stage commentator. This leaves Edgar stranded mutely, out of miracles because out of the play, out of the play because Lear himself becomes the play. The case would appear to be the exact opposite. Edgar, though employing theatricality to create something (a miracle) out of nothing (words), after the third act remains radically within the mimesis of the play. His miracle is grounded firmly in the "reality" of Gloucester's plight, his narrative function (as hero, as figure of parable, as ritual agent) is entirely traditional, his asides are never ironic. It is Lear who seizes the liminal zone of the stage to become the ironic commentator and metadramatic prankster. So it would seem that Edgar is left "back there" in the play,

awaiting Lear's return. However, if Lear does not return, there is no play. This King Who Must Die is none too eager to return to such a play, to such a mimetic world. Lear, albeit briefly, writes his own play, and will return to King Lear only on certain conditions. As we shall see, Lear at the end of the set piece will be gradually drawn back into the play--literally back toward center stage, theatrically back into mimesis--as he acknowledges other characters and literally "remembers who he is" in his mimetic reminiscences about court and daughters. Yet even then, Lear negotiates his own return.

Before we sketch a possible Clown-routine enactment of Lear's first set piece (which technically begins with his opening lines, since he in effect ignores Edgar's "competing" aside), we should first recall that Lear's likely savage appearance and the dismal mimetic situation radically defamiliarizes the well-known stage-clown performance, much as Poor Tom painfully problematized the conventional stage Bedlamite. Lear's appearance, whether pathetic or savage, seems likely to graft upon conventional costuming something like the mane of a Wild Man or the garland of a sacrificial victim, and in any case is as much a challenge as an invitation to laughter. Another observation to make is that Lear needs as Clown to make use of comic props. He probably carries with him the customary bag of tricks, a sack containing assorted props to fuel the Clown's spontaneous invention.

Finally, we must bear in mind the only textual reference to one of Lear's specific performative devices. Cordelia in 4.4 proclaims, "he was met even now / As mad as the vex'd sea, singing aloud" (2-3). From this we are tempted to infer that Lear in his mad performance often delivers his lines in outbursts of song, yet a cursory glance at the text of Lear's mad performance reveals nothing like the jigs or songs of the Fool and Poor Tom, no bits of doggerel or snatches from ballads. If Lear sings, he does so in completely disorganized fashion, at what moments we cannot say, but for what dramatic purpose we can guess--that once again the point is to defamiliarize the conventional routine, to subvert its humor so as to heighten its capacity for ironic commentary.

The speech itself breaks down into a series of discernible routines. The first is the impressment, which requires a prop for money, perhaps purses filled with stones, or even handfuls of stones. We might note the possibility that if Lear does carry a bag of tricks, the bag itself may be a tattered rag and may contain rubbish which a mad vagrant might gather, useless items which serve as a "piece of toasted cheese," a "gauntlet," perhaps the missiles he hurls at the giant. The impressment routine opens with Lear's claim to a limitless capacity for creating coinage, a power reinforced visually by the Clown's bottomless bag with its endless supply of stones, rag-purses, or other trash transmuted into money. The use of stones as props for coins is

a particularly intriguing option. Unlike purses, they readily conduce to Lear's gesture of presumably impressing his own image upon them by royal fiat, so that the royal voice--"I am the king himself"--stamps them, as it were, with the image of authority. If he actually addresses this line or another to the coins in an act of transmutation (the act of coining) such a gesture is neatly repeated near play's end in that Pygmalion emblem, when Lear tests Cordelia for signs of life by checking to see "If that her breath will mist or stain the stone" (5.3.261). Moreover, stones also provide a referent which renders the abstract "Nature's above art in that respect" (86) more concrete, illustrating how the king, at the pinnacle of nature, can confer upon mere idle pebbles greater value than that attributed to crafted gold. Normally, the king's word becomes the basis for material exchange when represented by gold, as though gold were the "natural" visible manifestation of the king's breath, the Word transmuted, the Image conferred. Yet the king of truly divine stature could if need be make gold coins of stones, the lowest and most dejected thing of Nature, as God could raise up lithic sons for Abraham (Matthew 3:9).

Whatever the prop--the representation of coins which are representations of the King's Word--this process of coining is related to a network of images of self-replication. Coining itself involves the dissemination of images of the King, and Lear, a king without a bureaucratic institution, in

invoking his power to coin may seem to be producing coinage as if from his own body, that Other, the Mystical Body of the King. Resembling the pelican, he shares the life of his own body, conferring it upon lesser bodies, the stones which he animates into coins, the coins which become soldiers. There may be a sustained if subdued allusion to the Cadmus myth, or a variant of it. Certainly Lear needs soldiers: "To't Luxury, pell-mell! For I lack soldiers" (116-17). But rather than sowing the Wrathful Dragon's teeth, Lear could scatter press-money into the audience, as if to make war upon the play itself.

A final prop-option for representing press-money deserves mention: rags. "Rag," of course, was a slang term for a trifling sum of money (e.g., Comedy of Errors, 4.4.89). Lear is rich in them, producing them, like the pelican, from his own body, liberally disseminating them as from the fountain of life to sustain a body politic, or an audience. With as many dolours for daughters as one could tell in a year, Lear in sharing these emblems of his sorrow with the audience transmutes them, from rags to rage, rage to revenge. Lear is the consummate ragman, a vagrant scavenger, but "Ragman" is also a cant term for a devil, perhaps a fiend with a red burning spit. If a father that wears rags does make his children blind, all the better to steal upon them and kill them many times over. A Lear whose prodigious raggedness is emphasized becomes a graphic emblem of the Father furioso,

the vulnerable avenger. In dire extremity, wild and raging he will attack a giant, yet simultaneously he is vulnerable to piercing by a pigmy's straw. Swaggering along the boards, he unbuttons here, at the border of the stage, divesting himself not of rule but of role, refusing to be a beggar in rags and conspiring with the audience his re-entry into the play. If "draw me a clothier's yard" is usually glossed as a command to a bowman to pull back his bowstring a great distance, it could also be an invitation to the audience to pull from him, from the actor's body, a yard of cloth, to extract as though from his inner essence infinite material to work with, so as to clothe ourselves like soldiers. Or if not putative whole cloth from rags, then money for provisions. After all, in the theater rags can be anything, can assume any identity contractually conferred by actor and audience. Lear appeals to theatricality itself to change rags into riches and to the audience to change the course of the play.

In his first three lines, Lear has emphasized both his interaction with the prop itself, displaying it and interpreting it "comically" for the audience, and his enactment of some stage ritual of "coinage," some act of metaphoric transmutation which simultaneously expresses and creates power. In his next lines Lear begins interacting with the audience itself, his perambulation now less stylized self-display than active engagement or confrontation with the audience: "There's your press-money." Lear scatters stones

among the crowd, raising an army, or else he arms it in rags. Perhaps this distribution outdoing excess occurs in a manic flurry of pebble-pelting or reckless unbuttoning, or perhaps in a more gentle sowing or leisurely strip-tease. Lear can treat either option as a joke, as a Pillicock prank or as a laconic Tarltonesque routine. In the aftermath of surprise or as part of a grinning stroll, Lear next singles out some individual audience member, probably a juvenile, though possibly a startled groundling stiff as a scarecrow: "That fellow handles his bow like a crow-keeper" (87-88). He points out this individual, while addressing his disparaging comment to a third party (another audience member) or to the audience at large, whom he treats as his collaborators. Extending his jest, he might direct his next line ("draw me a clothier's yard"--emphasizing "draw") at his butt as a satiric command, or (emphasizing "me") at the larger audience as an exhortation to more enthusiastic support of his theatrical campaign. Emphasizing "clothier's," he gestures toward his rags or blanket; emphasizing "yard," he waxes lugubriously bawdy.

The next lines, "Look, look! a mouse; Peace, peace, this piece of toasted cheese will do't" (88-90), clearly interrupt the speech. Before this interlude is the impressment, and after it comes the challenging and attacking of the giant. There are several intriguing possibilities for performing the lines, each of which functions differently. The moment is

most often treated as an hallucination, like that of the palace dogs in 3.6, which in the context of a Clown routine functions as an irruption of madness suddenly distancing the privileged performer from the audience. The first half of Lear's speech, before this interruption, can be performed so as to "make sense" to the audience. After all, the sudden appearance in this play of another fool if surprising is not genuinely shocking, especially if Lear parodies certain of the Fool's gestures--that is, if the Fool has taught him well. Likewise, we of course have a model for Lear's savage and lunatic appearance, his hair, grime, and rags an adaptation of the materials already provided in the play. And finally, the impressment routine itself is not altogether anomalous, since we can easily assume it to be a manifestation of the revenge of the father. (Also, let us recall that Cordelia has warned us at least partially of what to expect.) In other words, if we are surprised at Lear's grotesque appearance and manic behavior, we may simultaneously recognize this version of Lear as somehow inevitable, a surprise of recognition not unlike that we enjoy in a clever rhyme or joke.

But the joke is on us. For if the sight of the mad Lear is "side-piercing," this is so precisely because of Lear's comic representation of his own shame and degradation. It is the distancing afforded us by virtue of Lear's comic self-representation which persuades us that we are sufficiently

superior to him to comprehend his performance, thereby drawing us into the act of interpretation. We might well persuade ourselves that Lear's mustering of an army is related to his desire for revenge upon his sons and daughters. And then he attacks an invisible giant. Our theory evaporates. What we thought we knew turns out to be a deception, as unreal as Dover Cliff. It is this moment of hallucination, of the mouse and the piece of toasted cheese, which commences the undermining of what we know, though in a different way. For here Lear violates our expectations, since the convention of the Clown routine is that nonsense always leads somewhere (i.e., to a punchline or at least to a laugh), and thus subverts the privileged relation with us (which he has deliberately coined) by his sudden withdrawal into this hallucination. If we followed him for a moment, our comprehension is now suspended, and at this point, for as he proceeds to challenge and attack the giant, we know we have "missed" something.

Another possibility is that the mouse and the cheese are not an hallucination but a prank upon us and hence simply the invention (however feeble) of the stage Clown. Perhaps Lear is stranded for the moment, visibly unable to think of any other funny variation upon the impressment theme, or else having forgotten altogether what he was doing. Perhaps he becomes a bad Clown, and either from panic or profoundly feeble wit "invents" in the manner of Hamlet's vile clowns

"that will laugh themselves to set on some quantity of barren spectators to laugh with them." Or it may be that Lear is not stranded but entirely confident that he is "on a roll"--and it must be noted that Lear always proceeds in his Clown performance as though the audience is "there with him," as though we are laughing, whether or not we are--and that his prank is inspired by this very confidence. In any case, his exclamation, "Look, look! a mouse," surprises us and creates a brief disturbance. His "Peace, peace" is thus directed at the audience and means both "I was only kidding" and "Bear with me and I'll make this funny." Lear finishes the joke with "this piece of toasted cheese will do't," which may announce to the audience the onset of a well-known comic routine. We gain what is possibly a brief glimpse of this stage action in a scene from The Pilgrimage to Parnassus where Dromo leads in Clown by a cart rope and instructs him to ad lib for the audience during the present lull in the play. The Clown protests such a predicament as though it were the actor's nightmare, and demands, "But what must I do now?" Dromo replies, "Why if thou canst but draw thy mouth awry, lay thy leg over thy staff, saw a piece of cheese asunder with thy dagger, lap up⁷ drink on the earth, I warrant thee, they'll laugh mightily." There seems to have been a known low-comic routine involving the carving of cheese, probably into various amusing shapes inviting comment. Admittedly, the literal adaptation of such a routine

considerably slows down Lear's speech, yet it could emblematically connect Lear to the Fool if in 1.4.152ff. someone really did toss the Fool an egg which he sawed in half, eating up the meat and forming two crowns. Alternatively, Lear could madly allude to a cheese-carving routine while transforming other props, pulling idle items from his bag and naming them "cheese" or "gauntlet," all with the intent of amusing the house.

The final routine of the Clown speech commences with "There's my gauntlet" (90) and leads back toward center stage, an encounter with Edgar and Gloucester, and an eventual resumption of mimesis. Whether the "mouse" invention was a calculated interlude or a spontaneous interruption, Lear resumes his militaristic and vindictive enactment, confident in having rallied about him the great offstage army, whose laughter is the battle cry inspiring him to offer his gauntlet and "prove it on a giant" (90-91). Because of the visual dynamic created between Lear and this imagined giant, it is important to consider the stage locations of the two figures, three scenarios of which we shall examine. For one option Lear remains at the stage periphery while the giant is located offstage, being in or of the audience itself. This metadramatic option could be played as a comic twist to the Clown routine, showering the galleries with pebbles which fell the giant among us and thus exuberantly involving us in a way so startling as to encourage our indulging the marvel

and to preclude our inclination to interpret the event. Or it could mark a profound change in the relationship between Lear and the audience if he evolves from senile clown to mad paranoiac, so that his attack constitutes the preventive subduing of a potentially hostile group of tormenters. Not only are we thus radically estranged from the ironic commentator, but Lear is now alienated from his audiences both onstage and off, a performance situation which would favor a melancholic and self-pitying rendition of his reflective next speech ("Ha! Goneril with a white beard," etc.).

A more customary staging would have Lear see the giant somewhere onstage and move toward him, leading a charge and hurling projectiles as if at Goliath. If Lear as Clown has by false reassurance seduced us into accepting an interpretive frame to his mad self-representation--a frame by its very juxtaposition clearly superior to Edgar's reductive pathos, and yet a frame which explodes and leaves us "worse" than e'er we were--then this hallucination of a giant subverts, at least temporarily, what we thought we knew of his vengeful intent. But if we feel hermeneutically swindled by this now-distanced figure, that very distance (as opposed to the first option which retained privileged audience involvement) continues to encourage our acts of interpretation, for now with Lear employing the stage "mimetically," we see again Edgar mopping and mowing and wringing his hands, and Gloucester now stiffly alert--both characters interpreting. We too

wish to know what Lear is doing. Who is this giant? "It" does not seem feminine or otherwise conducive to our superimposing upon it the identity of the daughters. Our ritualistic reading, that the giant is a phallic son, the inversion of the patriarchal hierarchy as perceived by the discarded father, is admittedly a reconstruction from the scholar's study. The audience, burdened with immediate response, has been brought along with Lear only to watch him attack a quixotic figment. He becomes, simply, the mad king. We regret the loss of our privileged relation to him--which Gloucester will attain, which Edgar never has--and so are sympathetically predisposed to his forthcoming reflective lamentation.

A final staging possibility locates the giant so as to permit us a more concrete identification of him, which sustains though in a different form our relation to Lear. If the giant, center stage, is tall enough, he appears to reside in the heavens, not unrelated to the storm god who wet Lear once. It would appear to be the potential of this moment for Lear to rally the audience, the theater itself, against the heavens, for us all to storm the storm god in a penultimate emblem of mad justice. But more precisely, of a madman's justice; for Lear does not have the audience "there with him," yet he proceeds none the less as if he is generating a theatrical triumph. A critic struck by such an emblem, of Lear's assault upon the heavens, might be tempted to recon-

struct it as a Dionysian theatrical moment of communal dithyrambic frenzy, as a glorious apocalyptic suicide, or, with sociological formality, as a prefiguration of the English Civil War. But its foundation in delusion makes it perhaps the supreme emblem of Lear's alienation, a wretch throwing stones at the stars. Emblematically it connects with and highlights the climax of the play, when Lear enters with Cordelia dead in his arms: "Howl, howl, howl! O! you are men of stones. / Had I your tongues and eyes, I'd use them so / That heaven's vault should crack" (5.3.256-58). Because he is holding his dead daughter, he cannot even hurl stones (or soldiers) at the heavens; resistance is reduced to a howl. If the Fool in 1.4 crawled on all fours to illustrate his "Truth's a dog must to kennel" speech; if Tom in 3.6 became likewise quadrupedal when "throwing his head" at the palace dogs; Lear too at last becomes an animal, finally reduced to a beast howling at heaven's vault, himself a dying animal, who in his last moment unburdened crawls (on all fours?) toward death, toward Cordelia. If Lear in 4.6 does attack heaven's vault, perhaps this provokes the storm god, who subsequently reduces Lear to an animal and then exterminates him. The other two emblems to which the attacking-the-heavens emblem is linked are Lear's frequent unanswered prayers to the heavens to take the part of old men, and to that moment in 3.4 when Lear expressed curiosity about the heavens, asking Tom the cause of thunder. Tom's metadramatic

revelation of the theatrical production of stage-thunder teaches Lear that all is rigged, that he is trapped in a play in which he must die. Thus Lear resists the play's injustice or its tragic inevitability, resists it until he seizes the specious bait of Cordelia, who will lure him the rest of the way to death.

If mounting the attack upon the giant forms one emblem, which varies with Lear's and the giant's stage locations, the success of the attack creates another. "Bring up the brown bills" (91) is directed at his levied army--us--as he leads the charge. "O! well flown bird" (91) describes his artillery, more theatrically effective if an actual missile than an imagined arrow (a "bird-bolt"). The Q1 reading, "well flown bird in the ayre," works well describing a projectile, real or imagined, hurled up into the vault, whereas the F1 reading is more curious: "O! well flown bird; i'th'clout, i'th'clout." "Clout" could mean target, or as Marvin Rosenberg suggests, it could mean a loin cloth and hence be an evocative image of castration, particularly if with his next utterance "hewgh!" (which I take to rhyme with "oof!") Lear winces comically while miming a direct hit to the giant's groin.⁸ Otherwise, if "clout" means target and Lear recapitulates the David and Goliath motif, the wound could be to the head. Either way, Lear himself enacts the role of the stricken giant, becoming visually the castrated or head-stricken Titan, the deific father and mighty king himself

brought to ruin. Yet Lear is of course taunting his conquered enemy, gloating in exultation. Regardless of how we "read" the giant--as the phallic son who would kill him, as the phallic father in himself, now purged, as the allegorical giant Pride whom Lear must defeat to advance on his spiritual pilgrimage--performatively Lear is euphoric, extroverted, and primed for a confrontation with the others onstage, whom he now notices, with suspicion.

It may be that Lear in his dervish-like return to the mimetic center of the stage "discovers" Edgar and Gloucester, or it may be that Edgar, melodramatic and choric, as if having solicited audience approval valiantly approaches to intervene, to offer his services as guide. Either way, Lear conveys the impression of being interrupted and returned abruptly to a more mimetic level of interaction. Naturally, given his reluctance to return, he challenges the intruder: "Give the word" (92). Edgar here is denied the opportunity for the spontaneous self-representation (at which he excels) like that offered the disguised Kent upon his initial service-seeking approach to Lear in 1.4: "How now; what art thou?" (18), which is an invitation to give a speech. Instead, Lear demands a password, a rigidly abbreviated form of self-identification permitting a minimal degree of persona fabrication. Edgar's reply, "Sweet marjoram" (93), is entirely in keeping with the reductive choric pathos to which Edgar has committed himself. I presume it is Edgar's intent

to engage Lear in dialogue, that his reply sweetly faintly echoes Poor Tom and is intended as a step toward re-establishing the rapport which Tom earlier enjoyed with Lear as his Philosopher. It is "the word" because its vague madness indulges the madman, and it is a compassionate "linguistic herbal" indicative of Edgar's willingness to speak healing gentle gibberish as long as necessary to lead Lear from lunacy. Yet Edgar is indulging the madman, not the king, is treating Lear with the same fatherly condescension he employs with Gloucester. Lear is still vastly too shrewd and resourceful to be so quelled by a choric boy, and he deftly out-stage-maneuvers Edgar with a single word: "Pass" (94). When Edgar approached Lear, it was not with the intent simply to pass on, but to secure an "audience" with the king and to engage him in dialogue. But Edgar has not, in fact, given "the word" necessary to be granted dialogue with Lear; that remains for Gloucester to accomplish, wittingly or not. Instead he is commanded to pass, rather against his will since he thus leaves Gloucester vulnerable to Lear's approach. In crossing over to the other side of Lear, Edgar recapitulates his passage from madness, to which he can never return; he is irrevocably "beyond" Lear, and the two are mutually inaccessible. The crossing over creates a new stage tableau, with Lear now between the two. Lear may briefly retain Edgar as part of his audience, playing to him once or twice before focussing exclusively on Gloucester; probably Gloucester

appeals to Edgar's arbitration when he asks, "Is't not the king?" (107). Thus Edgar becomes estranged from the pair and excluded from the dialogue only gradually, as Lear draws nearer Gloucester. Or it may well be that Lear in commanding Edgar to "Pass" requires him to go further off (recapitulating Edgar's "Gone sir; farewell" (42) to Gloucester at "cliff-side") and at the outset banishes Edgar from his sight. The first option works best with Q1--"Ha, Gonorill, ha Regan" (96)--which clearly includes Edgar in Lear's "discovery," while Edgar's exclusion is permitted by F1's "Ha! Goneril, with a white beard!" In either case, Edgar becomes relegated to the periphery of the dialogue (where monology belongs) to resume his choric mopping and mowing. Edgar's gambit has been to combine the privileged intimacy of Poor Tom with the treachery of the guide. Its effect is to negate his personae of both priestly father figure and Philosopher brother, and to reduce him to reductive choric function, leaving Lear quite discursively dominant. Edgar's Pass-age across the stage, to the other side of Lear, effects the ritual transfer of Gloucester's guardianship from the son to the fellow discarded father.

As Edgar moves he reveals to Lear Gloucester speaking: "I know that voice" (95). Just possibly Gloucester is referring to the voice which said "Sweet marjoram," with its plaintive echo of Poor Tom, motivating Edgar all the more to cross over and expose his father to Lear. This enactment

would highlight Gloucester's abandonment and heighten the pathos of his next line which appeals to the guide who is not there, the fisherman and witness to his fall who presumably disappears from the play. The three figures onstage thus are remarkably alienated from one another, the camaraderie of refugees dissolved, as if to make one yearn for the fellowship of the heath again. But most likely "that voice" is Lear's, to which Gloucester turns as if for salvation or healing.

Lear has already "smelt out" Edgar by the condescending indulgence of the madman implicit in his Word, "Sweet marjoram." Now he "discovers" his daughter, or an elderly courtier, in any case a sycophantic tormenter who would drag him away from the audience and the pleasures of theatricality back into the horrors of the play. Or a pair of tormenters, if we adapt the Q1 reading: "Ha Gonorill, ha Regan." In the latter case Lear presumably discovers in both of his interlocutors his daughters in disguise. Whereas if he discovers only one daughter, "Goneril, with a white beard!" (F1), he might "expose" her to Edgar, whom he needs temporarily for his audience, since he needs to say "they" to someone. But if Edgar and Gloucester both become daughters, they might function as the visual referents of a speech addressed to the offstage audience. In other words, Lear might retain his privileged relationship with us by exposing to us these two onstage impostors who wish to flatter Lear back into the

play. He then proceeds to explain to us his own version of the mimetic situation, as though this very wielding of hermetic authority were his precondition for re-entering it. In this respect he competes with Edgar, who likewise would impose upon us a monologic interpretation of events, except that Edgar utilizes the mimetic voice of the chorus, whereas Lear retains the metadramatic speech of a stage fool

Lear's prose, now less disjointed and less manically mimed than in his previous speech, is morose and bitter and not unlike that of Feste or Jaques, a development in performative mode from the Clown to the melancholy Fool. The satire in the speech is evident in the tone and the occasional jokes, as disturbingly unfunny as his pranks as Clown. We may now pose another description of the rhetorical progress of Lear's mad speeches. Earlier we inferred from the increasing organization of his speech a desire to emerge from "pure" mad language so as genuinely to communicate to Gloucester. Now we may pose a formal description, that Lear progresses from antic Clown to melancholy Fool (in the present reminiscent speech) to formal satirist in his next speech and thereafter. If Lear resolutely clings to his privileged role of stage fool, it is because he refuses to re-enter the play as anything less than the king himself--specifically, the King of Fools, for he will be both (as we shall see). When challenged to "give the word," Edgar produced a reply adequate to pass himself out of Lear's play but not sufficient

to retrieve Lear into the mimetic play. Edgar's reply acknowledged the madness (the weeds) and hence external reality. Lear insists on the internal reality, which can be perceived only by a blind man, one not "pierced" by sight and hence privileging that sense, one who knows the word because he knows only by means of the word. It is Gloucester, then, who rescues Lear, Gloucester who gives the word: "Is't not the King?" And with this misprised suppliant for his nuncio, Lear regally re-enters King Lear, dispensing justice, or else injustice, more or less in verse.

But although Lear has exposed his false courtier-daughters, he has done so in a prose which remains curiously inward-looking and confidential, a prose appropriate to the metadramatic domain of the melancholic fool but also echoing the stance of what Alvin Kernan calls the rural Piers satiric narrator and containing tag-ends of Kinsayderian obscurant-⁹ism. He has not actually publicized them as duplicitous exempla, declaiming in the rhetoric of public speech. He is not yet speaking in verse with the regal pomp and decorum appropriate to his mimetic role. It is only when Gloucester "gives the word"--the right word--which identifies Lear as having that in his voice which one would fain call king, only then that Lear consents fully to re-enter the play and resume that public declamatory burden of high mimesis so different from the prose of the metadramatic fool, whose irony is always self-reflexive. With "Ay, every inch a king," which

constitutes his first "real" response to those onstage, Lear resumes issuing commands and dispensing the law of his word, the word refused him by Edgar but given by Gloucester.

At this restoration, Gloucester takes to his knees, evidently trembling with emotion ("When I do stare, see how the subject quakes" [108]). Lear interprets Gloucester's gesture as an imploration for mercy, which he instantly grants: "I pardon that man's life" (109). We can understand why Lear offers this pardon when we consider how Lear perceives and interprets Gloucester's mutilation, that "case of eyes" toward which his attention and commentary will increasingly gravitate. Lear perceives the mutilated Gloucester as the victim of tyrannic injustice, unjust not because of the cruelty of the injury but because of its infliction by a false justicer--a usurper (i.e., Cornwall). Gloucester, like all punished criminals, bears upon his body the mark of the Prince's wrath which graphically testifies to his power to effect revenge. Indeed, one might easily presume Gloucester to be a condemned man, marked by the spectacle of his blinding, being led about the countryside by a deputy (Edgar--indeed, his deathsman) on a "progress" toward the scaffold. During this macabre journey, the doomed one is compelled at every poor pelting village to proclaim his crime, exemplifying the Prince's wrath with the spectacle of his maiming and dramatizing it later in the ceremony of execution. On the metadramatic level we would observe that Edgar has al-

ready paraded Gloucester and his crime before the theater audience, fully exposing the sins of the mutilated one and extorting and exploiting his confession in the name of rehabilitating him. Perceiving Gloucester's blindness and custody as the mark and dramatization of authorized punishment, and interpreting Gloucester's kneeling as a supplication for mercy, Lear imperially countermands the sentence Gloucester is under and directs his order to Edgar: "I pardon that man's life." This command effects the transfer of Gloucester's custody from Edgar to Lear, saving the father from the son. Lear now has a subject, the first of his new kingdom. Onstage, Edgar must obey the order to desist (a secular exorcism) by removing himself from proximity to the king and his pardoned subject, whose salvation Lear has procured by exonerating him altogether of sin, without half the trouble to which Edgar put him just to fake a miracle.

Lear "reads" Gloucester's crime as well as his punishment. We recall the chilling, chanted repetition of "traitor" by Cornwall and Regan in 3.7, and the "courtesy" done to Cornwall's wrath at the rebel, barely restrained by his acknowledgement of the "form" of that law not yet solely his own. In addition to reading the Prince's signature in Gloucester's mutilation, Lear reads Gloucester's crime allegorically by its similar encoding in Gloucester's very body. He turns now from the deputy to the defendant himself: "What was thy cause? / Adultery?" (109-10). Lear recognizes in

the blinding the emblematically appropriate punishment meted out for such a moral crime--adultery, not treason as claimed by the usurper--but he pardons the father by legalizing (apparently retrospectively) the crime: "Let copulation thrive" (114). And he gives his reasons: "For Gloucester's bastard son / Was kinder to his father than my daughters / Got 'tween the lawful sheets" (114-16). The father has been punished sufficiently by the son, who would kill him anyway, were he lawful or not. The crimes of the fathers, Lear seems to think, are assuredly not the cause of these hard hearts, of parricidal children. Perhaps the cause lies in nature, as he suggests in the 3.6 trial scene. But the father pardons the father, currently interpreting Gloucester's eyes as emblems of the venial sin of adultery. Soon enough Lear will build upon Gloucester's "case of eyes" a bitter indictment of "these son in laws," of these crimes against the father. However, after finally killing the father, the son will have the last word: "The dark and vicious place where thee he got / Cost him his eyes" (5.3.171-72). This is Edgar's pronouncement to the dying Edmund, with the tacit approval of Albany, the other son.

But this pardoning of the adulterer functions on another level as well. Perhaps the suppliant Gloucester clasps Lear's knees or Lear otherwise is holding Gloucester in a gesture of protective intervention. Especially if Lear is still holding stones or they are scattered onstage about the

pair, Lear's intervention to save the adulterer from the death sentence might well allude to John 8, in which Christ rescues the adulteress about to be stoned to death. Lear eventually will develop the argument ("The usurer hangs the cozener" [161], etc.) that no sinner has the authority to condemn another sinner. Yet at this very moment of Christlike intervention and pardon, at the moment of the visitation of grace and the display of the quality of mercy, so lacking in the play, Lear turns perverse and even Satanic. He opens his countermand thusly: "Thou shalt not die" (111), which, if delivered with mock incredulity and sardonicism, echoes Satan's lie to Eve in the Garden of Eden. And as he continues Lear changes utterly from Christlike to Vicelike, advocating wanton copulation. For an instant Lear's intervention promised to echo Christ's and aroused our expectation that his impending didactic defense of his judgment would similarly echo Christ's proclamation of grace, the argument that the Father condemns the sin but forgives the suppliant sinner. Instead Lear pardons the sin itself, denying us once more whatever moral closure and reconciliation we think we desire.

Lear pardons human promiscuity not on the basis of Christlike compassion (unmerited grace), but on the basis of the lechery of animals, those equally culpable and equally forgiven cousins of the bipedal "forked animal." Animal copulation proceeds apace (unregulated and unjudged) "in

[his] sight" (113), Lear's subtext being, "And I neither condemn nor punish them." To Lear belongs even moral law, and who can arraign him for it? We become aware now that Lear's new kingdom consists of more than a blind man and the occasional hallucinated (or metatheatrically dubbed) brown bill, comprised instead of birds, bugs, and bipedal beasts, granted sexual free will by this weed-crowned Wild Man. His anti-Christian moral equating of man and beast culminates in the memorable line, "Let copulation thrive." Not "let copulation be fruitful," but "let the act of darkness itself proliferate, regardless of its end." Lear's proclamation is the opposite of the advice of Tom's Servingman, that heir and abusive wielder of the phallus, that penitent wretch enthralled to the fiend. Lear's counsel is demonic, not demoniac, and to obey it is eventually to become Poor Tom. Only after the fiat that sin is not sin does Lear reveal the enormous egotism which generated his regal and fiendish proclamation: that the filial treachery against Gloucester is more deserved than that against Lear, the man more sinned against than sinning. Once more Lear has projected his own situation upon another wretch in order to vindicate himself. In the process he argues that moral observance neither confers nor produces virtue. After all, the royal bed, source and epitome of lawfulness, has produced monsters.

Compounding Lear's theological impiety are his incitements to lechery and his crude bawdy joking, solicitous

efforts at "male bonding" with a famous rake. His line, "To't Luxury, pell-mell! / For I lack soldiers" (116-17), marks an increased salaciousness in his speech well beyond the requirements of argument--unless we perceive a turn in the argument, that the very lechery just pardoned is now "impressed" into Lear's service. Luxury seems a personification, as though it were a deity called down to take his part, commanded to a mass rape. Luxury seems no mere abstraction, but a chthonically inspired frenzy presiding over a pitched battle, a sexual conflagration of all animals everywhere, a clash which ironically does not destroy but creates soldiers. At least since "Let copulation thrive," Lear has been declaiming as though formally, and unless he identifies Luxury with Gloucester, it is with the next line commencing "Behold yond simpering dame" (117) that he resumes directly addressing Gloucester, sharing smutty humor with him, derogating women. There may or may not be an onstage visual referent for the Simpering Dame, but in either case Lear now embarks on a comic pantomime of her, not adopting a new persona, though he affects her gestures and perhaps speech, but satirizing a type through mime in the manner of a court fool's impersonation. If Lear "becomes" the woman in a self-induced Tiresian transformation, this sexual metamorphosis occurs only in a figurative sense unless Lear in his performance actually mimes the taking on of female anatomical features (which is both possible and effective, as we shall

see). Otherwise, we must assume simply that Lear imagines this woman so vividly that her sexuality becomes, to him, loathsome.

The enactment of the first phase of the Simpering Dame routine might proceed as follows. To begin with, the opening line, "Whose face between her forks presages snow" (118), on the page creates a fearsome double image of, simultaneously, affected chastity and a vagina dentata. But there might be a performative reason, since there is no metric one, for putting "presages snow" after "between her forks." On "Whose face," the actor points to his face while simpering; on "between her forks" he points to his groin, crossing his legs or touching his knees together; on "presages snow" he tugs at his beard. With a slight pause after "presages," "snow" becomes the punchline to a three-part "bit" routine and conveys not only frigid but ancient chastity, spinsterhood, the bleached pudenda of a crone. It also provides a subterranean link between Lear and Tiresias. In the next line, perhaps to "mince virtue" Lear takes tiny steps with his knees together, and then he "shakes the head," his weeds flying back and forth, while clapping his hands to his ears in the coy refusal of a woman--with her hair down. Lear's initial enactment of the Simpering Dame is intended as an act of "male bonding" with the legendary adulterer, reinforcing with mockery that double bind of the woman assaulted with sexual overtures, who is a hypocrite if she refuses and a

whore if she submits, and either way the one blamed for male lechery. We see how thoroughly Lear by now has exonerated Gloucester who, like his son the Servingman, is the victim of women, especially when he conquers them.

It is possible that Lear becomes engulfed by the very woman whom he mimes. An intriguing recurrent pattern to note in the speech is the counterpoint between "above" and "below," which depicts a radical bifurcation of the human body as, among other things, the site of a clash between gods and fiends. We may trace the pattern through the speech as follows, bearing in mind that performative gestures emphasize the impression of dichotomy: "face" (above); "forks" (below); "mincing virtue," performed as I have suggested (below); "shake the head" (above); "goes to't," with a grinding of the hips (below); "down from the waist" (below); "all above" (above); "but to the girdle" (above); "beneath is all the fiend's," etc. (below). The performative ramifications are important, for the more vividly Lear represents this dichotomy with his own body, the more his body visually becomes that of the Simpering Dame whom he "represents," his satiric mimickry metamorphosing into the actual persona. Thus Lear's nauseated contemplation of the vagina becomes a nightmarish transformation if Lear "discovers" such a vagina on his own person, continuing as he does to imagine or even to mime the copulative act.

Yet despite the now standard critical contention that

the sole object of Lear's horror and loathing is feminine sexuality, that this nauseated and vertiginous fall into the vagina constitutes his final descent into hell, let us pause momentarily at the suburbs to consider an alternative which offers a slight adjustment to our perception of his loathing of women, a move slightly away from an "hysterical" misogyny toward a more generally inclusive misanthropy, a merciful move made possible through the minor consolations of mutual condemnation and the minor propitiations of comic performance. Lear belongs in hell. He commences his description of the vaginal abyss by identifying its owner: "Beneath is all the fiend's" (126). The fiend, throughout the play continually linked with the phallus, not only belongs in hell as, analogically, a phallus does in a vagina, but the vaginal hell is simultaneously both its punishment and its reward, in any event its heritage and hence its property. As the gods "inherit" the rational being above the girdle, the men-fiends inherit the nether remainder. Men both own the vagina and dwell in it (while copulating, but also while being engendered) as in a prison. As copulation occurs in hell, so then does engendering, which brings forth baby demons to punish their parents. Here is the culmination of the descent: "There's hell, there's darkness, there is the sulphurous pit." Lear is poised before the vagina, dangling over the abyss, and his next line (127-28) describes the fateful plunge into destruction: "burning, scalding, stench, con-

sumption" (Q1: "consumation" [sic]). The burning and scalding describe the agonies of immersion in the lake of fire, the stench the drowning, and the consumption the devouring by the pit (or the "consumation" the completion in death); this description of course applies sexually to the vagina as well. If we interpret these last few lines then as profoundly misogynistic, as a horrified hallucination of the vagina dentata, we must read Lear's next words, "Fie, fie, fie!; pah, pah!" (128), as a furious struggle to emerge from his loathsome fantasy, and as a purgative vomiting.

Yet as we did with "Whose face between her forks pre-sages snow," we can suggest here a performative option which obscures these most horrible imaginings, driving them back beneath the text where they belong, like an hysterica passio quelled or a wandering womb kept at bay, until, as at Lear's final (5.3) request for an unbuttoning, she emerges to be embraced--Cordelia, death, and Mother Night. If we return to this poisoning before the vagina ("there's hell," etc.), we might ask whether the ongoing bawdiness of Lear's routine retains its performative momentum such that Lear never loses sight of Gloucester nor loses his desire to derogate women in Gloucester's illustrious company. If so, then "burning, scalding, stench, consumption/consumation" might describe not the vagina but the phallic descent into it as part of a miming of copulation, miming intended as a display of virile bravado. The "burning" he mentions implies both lust and

venereal disease, compounded and contracted in intercourse. "Scalding" marks an intensification of the copulating process, while "stench" is a cumulative by-product of the act. At or near the climax is "consumption," perhaps alluding to the womb, that monster of the deep, popularly conceived as an animal hungry to devour semen and sometimes "wandering" in search of it. To treat Lear's wandering womb, culprit behind his hysterica passio, conventional medical wisdom would offer a simple prescription: the patient needs to be ravished. Which in a sense Lear has been, with a coyly feigned reluctance--"let fall your horrible pleasure" (3.2.19)--not unlike the Simpering Dame's shaking her head to hear of pleasure's name. The climax of Lear's enactment, "fie, fie, fie! pah, pah!", consists of a condemnation simultaneous with orgasm itself, the very embodiment of the woman's sexual dilemma and the moralist's masochism, expressed in vomiting. In this the extremity of his own satiric bravado, Lear exposes the hollowness of his boasting. He seems too delicately modest to assume the phallic function of the Fool or Wild Man, and is even the opposite of the Simpering Dame, outwardly pretending lust while inwardly incapable of "going to't." Rather, Lear is more Tiresian, an impotent prophet, and therefore more likely to be comfortable with that wry and dour mode of satire. Our option, then, to a strictly misogynistic reading of Lear's sexual horror is to view it as a more blanket condemnation of all lechery--tainted, certainly, with misogy-

ny--which means that Lear has come full circle from his swaggering pardon of Gloucester's adultery at the outset of the speech. Implicit in his disgust at Gloucester's "cause" is a de facto annulment of that pardon.

In the aftermath of vomiting Lear seeks a cure from Gloucester: "Give me an ounce of civet, good apothecary, / To sweeten my imagination" (129-30). The Good Apothecary is an apt role for Gloucester, who as a notorious rake is well qualified to cure sexual disgust and impotency, to transmute it into properly accomplished lechery. Indeed, Lear in seeking to sweeten his imagination is yearning not for moral purification but for delivery from stench and nausea, so it is ironic that he requests from Gloucester civet, the social function of which is to seduce potential sexual partners. We should note that Lear's entire pantomime of the Simpering Dame is performed in a comic mode. The Good Apothecary exchanges could be performed so as to extend the comic mode, potentially erupting into full-blown burlesque in the ensuing transaction between Lear and Gloucester: "There's money for thee." / "O! Let me kiss that hand" (131). Gloucester, probably still kneeling before his master, has taken over some of Edgar's choric function of displaying silent anguish, all the while straining to interpret Lear's speech. But Lear if still whimsical could misprize Gloucester's response to the proffered hand such that Gloucester becomes the (rather forward) kneeling suitor to the Simpering Dame to whom he

makes his loves, an Apothecary offering a sexual cure superior to simple civet. Lear's offer to wipe his hand would thus be either mockingly coy or riotously frank. Playing this passage as a burlesque would satisfactorily explain at least two subsequent lines. Lear with "Dost thou squiny at me?" (135) parodies Gloucester's pathetic display of confused concentration by taking offense at the Apothecary's "oeillades," his leering at Lear. Lear continues: "No, do thy worst, blind Cupid; I'll not love" (136), which comprises the Dame's rejection of the adulterer's advances. Such a bizarre comic routine could continue, through the "challenge" in defense of the Dame's honor, through Edgar's aside at the height of such pathetic degradation, up to the point where Lear is compelled to acknowledge Gloucester's blindness and inability to "play along" with Lear. Though I do not prefer this option of having Lear adopt the Simpering Dame as a full-blown persona, I mention it because it illustrates our larger interpretive problem at this point in the scene, which lies in accounting for the obvious shift in topic from sexuality to the question of "how this world goes." We need to provide some sort of focused dynamic for the early dialogue between Lear and Gloucester, those ten lines or so which bridge the Simpering Dame speech with Lear's sudden outburst of raillery against social injustice. We shall examine this dialogue more closely, proceeding inductively for a while.

Lear draws closer to offer Gloucester money. Extending

his hand and touching Gloucester, he literally gives the blind man something to grasp, a tangible conduit into dialogue with his king and in fact the only possible means of entry for Gloucester, who can never be certain when he is being addressed. Only now does Gloucester know he is being summoned and has the king's attention, and so, eagerly clutching the hand that clutches the money, Gloucester overreacts to his opportunity for communicating with his king. Crying "O! Let me kiss that hand," he overburdens his exclamation with emotion, emotion made evident in his desperate and ravenous grasping of the hand. Lear's options are to withdraw the hand or to allow Gloucester to clasp and kiss it. If he withdraws it, he may or may not leave Gloucester holding a prop (money or a purse). If Gloucester is left empty-handed, we must take his next lines, "O ruin'd piece of Nature! This great world / Shall so wear out to naught" (133-34), as a formal choric lament which, like Edgar's response to Lear--or more precisely, to us about Lear--is compassionate and yet dismisses madness as "naught." Given especially the incongruity of "wear out" with Lear's performative exuberance and outright mania, Gloucester's lines must convey the formality of declaimed moralizing and hence compel comparison with Edgar's efforts at imposing platitudinous closure.

However, if Lear leaves in Gloucester's hand either money or his own hand, Gloucester gains several theatrical

advantages by having a visual referent with which to act. It provides the actor his own miniature set piece, for now his choric commentary is in a sense "about" the object he grasps. The blind man teaches us a new way of seeing the object, and by including it in his address he causes a formal expression of grief to signify on numerous levels, thus "ironizing" it. The use of either of two props renders the lines either "metaphysically" striking or else simply strange and defamiliarizing. The first prop option is a glove Lear wears, worn through at the fingers. Thus "piece" would refer to the fabric or to the glove itself, Gloucester might say "wear out" while grasping a naked finger, and a devious Lear might wag a finger at "naught." The pathos of Gloucester's kneeling supplication for the King's Touch, as if it could heal, is subverted by the rampant punning, which would be consistent with the frequent keen puns in Gloucester's subsequent replies to Lear. The second prop option is best employed if Lear withdraws his hand, which, still in keeping with the Dame's coyness or possibly parodying the glorified Christ's "Noli me tangere," denies the emotional healing latent in physical affection, leaving Gloucester "worse," more isolated than ever. The best option here is for Lear to give him an empty purse with a hole in it, which Gloucester can turn inside out, sticking a finger through the hole while delivering the speech. This empty purse proves very useful ten lines later when Lear exclaims, "No eyes in your head, nor no

money in your purse? Your eyes are in a heavy case, your purse in a light" (143-45). It might also prove functional during Lear's subsequent raillery against bribery and corruption. The final prop option, less interesting, is once more the stone, which does illustrate nicely the reference to "Nature," as it may have earlier for "Nature's above art in that respect," and the wearing out suggests the erasure of the king's image from the "coin," as though a coin might be reduced to "naught." Gloucester might even appear deceived, the blind man thinking this a real coin so worn out. Lear the coiner "tricks" Gloucester with a counterfeit.

For Gloucester's response to Lear's overture to him at the outset of their dialogue, I prefer the use of props not only for the striking emblems which such a situation might yield, but also because Gloucester thus has the opportunity to wield wit, consistent with the tenor of his next several replies. Gloucester speaks feelingly--keenly but wittily. He must. His relatively constrained opportunity for speaking requires such turns of wit in order for his brief speeches to sustain the burden of the pain which animates them. His wit is not aggressive, not competitive quibbling with Lear, though Lear may perceive it this way. Rather, his remarks are either melodramatic representations of his own affliction, borne now in the isolation of utter darkness, or expressions of grief at Lear's degradation, still with overtones of self-pity. Concluding his "O ruin'd piece of

Nature" speech, full as it is of witty puns, is the simple question, "Dost thou know me?" (133), which demonstrates that Gloucester does not even recognize the extent to which Lear is (by now) satirizing and (ironically, given the pardon) condemning Gloucester's lust and perhaps his proffered pity as well. We see that Gloucester's responses do not constitute conscious discursive struggle, but remain inward-directed commentary not especially intended to sustain the pair's dialogue.

Lear seems to sense the wit but not the resigned isolation in Gloucester's voice and thus, jealous as was the Fool that others would not let him have all the Fool himself, to some of Gloucester's remarks Lear replies effusively in bravura displays of satiric virtuosity. What P.W. Thomson observes of the Fool's relationship to Lear might equally apply here to Lear's with Gloucester:

In so far as Lear's Fool is a character, it is his endeavour to prevent his master from playing the fool. In so far as he is a numinous force, he guides Lear to the brink of folly but cannot lead him in. [10]

Though Lear has clearly demonstrated since his entrance into this scene his choice of the role-less role of the self-defining fool, we also have seen how Lear holds out re-entering the mimesis of the play until his kingship is acknowledged. This apparent conflict between roles, and between the domains of metadrama and mimesis, is simply enough resolved: Lear would play the fool on a kingly scale. What

he desires most from the mimetic role of king is the power on the mimetic level to impose monologic discourse, and yet he wishes also to retain the fool's radical self-conscious awareness of his privileged relation to the audience, enjoying also the power of "pure" performance inhering in that metadramatic relation. Lear's "condition" for re-entering the mimesis of King Lear is that he retain the same histrionic dominance and metadramatic self-determination ascribed to the stage-clown in a solo performance.

Upon first entering the scene and "working" the stage perimeter, Lear experiences that power which is a quality of the ultimate fluidity in role-playing attainable onstage. The mimetic role of king, even of a blustering Termagant, is actually, as Lear has discovered, both constrained and vulnerable, neither "everything" nor "ague-proof." The theatrical situation affording the greatest performative power would be that of the itinerant fool, whose only master is us--the audience itself--that masterable master. As "solo" stage-clown early in his appearance, Lear taps the full power derived from an audience. It is only through the awareness of an audience that self-conscious role-playing and role-changing become meaningful and confer performative power. The fool's position is ideal because his acknowledgement of the audience is superficial, his deference to them feigned. His routines invite our feedback, as in the legendary Tarleton's extemporaneous and elaborate responses to lines or

topics or even challenges hurled at him from his audiences, but like every fool his mere possession of the stage, his centrality and hence his reception of all attention, guarantees him the last word and provides him power sufficient to outwit, shout down, or divert any challenge to his dominance. The audience by its very attention confers representational power upon the actor, maximized when the actor-audience covenant permits the actor freedom to choose and change roles. Lear entering as stage-clown accepts this authority from us without even having to weather our circumscribed challenges, neither needing nor truly acknowledging our response since, as I have suggested, there is none. We are too stupefied at the incongruity of Lear's transformation and at the shock of his appearance to do other than passively permit Lear his hour of folly upon the stage.

Gloucester provides a suitably attentive yet deferential mimetic audience for Lear, conducive to his playing the kingly fool. In fact, he provides the only suitable audience for Lear since he has passed so much of his time onstage as audience to someone else's play. Gloucester has proven inept as an actor, bungling his roles as outraged father, host, conspirator, and even as suicide. He has been much more adept in the role of audience. His foolish credulity qualifies him perfectly to respond predictably to Edmund's playlet implicating Edgar. To Regan's and Goneril's performance in 2.4 which disinherits Lear, he is the appropriate audience

whose silence makes him the "witness" to ratify the tyrants' action. He matures into the more compassionate audience for Lear's distress in the third act, yet seems curiously squeamish, intent on procuring physical aid as though to be gone and avoid facing Lear's degradation or the dangers of assisting him. He is in his own way both idealistic and cowardly. It is this naive escapism which renders his brutalization at Cornwall's hands so frightening, climactic, and (for him) anagnoritic, as the scene occasions the sudden reversal of his naivety and cowardice. His dilemma as audience henceforth is that now that he would see--see things as they are; see how this world goes; see as would a wise spectator--he cannot. It is precisely this change in character, or more accurately, in disposition, which makes Gloucester the ideal audience for Edgar's playlet at "Dover Cliff." For he is skeptical, even suspicious, and is thoroughly apprised of depravity, guilt, and betrayal. It is this resistant disposition which Edgar must endeavor to overcome, and by his performative work he "earns" the miracle he produces. As with the blinding, again Gloucester's prior disposition provides the energy which is released in the sudden anagnoritic reversal of his perception. Gloucester's post-performance exhilaration resembles that of any skeptically-disposed audience which witnesses a suddenly stunning performative moment, its disbelief instantly reversed. It confers power by applauding, by acknowledging its contingent belief, con-

tingent upon its awareness and acceptance of its role as audience and of the performer's conventionalized rights.

But Gloucester, on the other hand, has never thought of himself as an audience and has instead clung to something of a Ptolemaic self-conception, that he is at the center, being observed as if he were on a stage, even if before an audience of gods bored enough to kill him for their sport. Gloucester and the theater audience both retain the illusion of control, the audience by granting acceptance of its role, Gloucester by the delusion that he is an actor. But now encountering Lear, Gloucester is profoundly aware of being an audience, with its burden to respond. His role is our role, and we watch him play it. He is experiencing yet a new form of suffering, made captive to a "side-piercing sight" which he cannot even see and to which a comic response is urged. Lear has likewise compelled the offstage audience to be more aware than ever of its role, for by entering a fool for our entertainment, he demands the response we cannot give him. We too suffer, sight-pierced. We are reluctant to see Lear re-enter as though sacrificially the mimesis of the play, yet we are relieved that someone else--Gloucester--assumes the burden of response. As audience we are only now learning to suffer, for as William Matchett points out, King Lear will feed us false hope after false hope, leading us to yearn for the very sort of sham miracle (the sparing of Cordelia) which we scorned at "cliff-side."¹¹ Perhaps Gloucester will open our eyes and teach us to respond.

I have elaborated the relationship of Lear with Gloucester because of its centrality to much of the remainder of the mad performance. Lear after one brief exchange has refused to "play" anymore with Edgar, yet he persists in attempting to draw Gloucester into the performance as a kind of straight man. As he was for Edgar, Gloucester is for Lear the perfect audience, not because he may be told what to see and how to interpret it, but because his replies are fundamentally sincere, at most profound and hence easily circumscribed by irony and satire. Lear recognizes that a Fool needs both a butt--someone for him to display as the "true fool"--and an audience to witness and approve this display (the audience itself can serve both functions). Some madmen, such as beggars and village idiots, perform out of the need for physical sustenance or toleration and hence perform routines of self-degradation which sustain the gap between the condemned and the community. But other madmen have the (literary) leisure to imitate the fool and prove all others mad, like Lear who issues challenges from the outset, so that these madmen blur the distinction between the mad and the sane, positing instead the dichotomy of foolish versus enlightened madness. To Gloucester's "O! Let me kiss that hand," perfectly "normal" in the context of mimetic pathos, Lear replies, "Let me wipe it first; it smells of mortality," which means, "Why do you worship a hand made of ordinary flesh?" To his "Dost thou know me?" Lear replies, "I remem-

ber thine eyes well enough," which means, "Of course I know you, but do you know yourself?"

Before proceeding into an explication of Lear's dialogue with Gloucester, we ought to contextualize the dialogue more precisely by recapitulating the formal development of Lear's uses of folly. As Poor Tom performed in numerous modes of madness, so Lear employs several performative modes of folly from the least to the most dignified in a general progression from stage clown to formal verse satirist. Lear enters as the stage clown as though providing us a comic interlude and hence "bonding" with us in a privileged actor/audience relationship. Both the performative mode and the metadramatic relationship are interrupted by his frenzied attack upon the giant. His next mode is complicated by his awareness of an onstage audience which beckons him back into the play. At the mimetic borders of the play as he returns center-stage, Lear offers ironic commentary upon previous mimetic events in the mode of the melancholy or bittersweet Fool. And yet the greater his awareness and resentment of his onstage audience, the more his sputtering prose might remind us of the dissembling "public voice" of Malevole in The Malcontent. When he discovers a confidant (Gloucester) and rids himself of the hostile interlocutor (Edgar), like Malevole Lear begins employing verse in a mode and on a topic already similar to those of the formal verse satirist. But this mode degenerates rather than develops because of Lear's manic bawdy

mimings, the performance of an inspired "natural." At the self-destruction of the Simpering Dame routine Lear finds the dynamic with his interlocutor changed. Since Gloucester refuses to play the Apothecary, it is now a struggle for histrionic dominance. When Lear regains this dominance, he will have found the topic and will have the impetus for his climactic performance as the formal verse satirist, the railing malcontent.

If we have suggested tentatively a formal explanation for why Lear changes his performance from set piece to dialogue, let us now attempt to describe how this shift is effected. We assume that the Dame disappears. This satiric impersonation grew out of control metamorphosing into a monster (the centaur), and then into a demon or even hell itself, and was exorcised as Lear vomited. Or else the satirist, that vitriolic misogynist, coupled with his creation, "died" (while already in hell), and was resurrected in a sort of amniotic vomit, that stench of birth which makes us cry "the first time that we smell the air." With the Dame gone and in the absence of any dominant persona, the performance resumes its disjointed unpredictability and develops into exploratory dialogue as Lear seeks out quibbles en route to a new persona. He offers Gloucester the role of Apothecary, the pseudo-physician who might heal the satirist from the ravages of his own imagination. But instead of a collaborative offering of sweet but condescending marjoram, Gloucester

offers adoration. Lear mocks his veneration and thus parries Gloucester's attempt at changing the game they are playing into serious ceremony, from satire to melodrama, from male bonding to feudal bonding. Without the performative context of a dominant persona (the Dame), Lear's and Gloucester's exchanges do become competitive in the sense that each is an attempt at defining the context of its own utterance and of the larger dialogue as well. Without a continuous persona to sustain the illusion of unity, Lear's "it smells of mortality" and Gloucester's "This great world shall so wear out to naught" become competing encomia, the former of a bitter, self-implicating Juvenalian, the latter of a mourner for the Golden Age (an echo of Gloucester's "almanac lament" from 1.2: "We have seen the best of our time" [109]). Gloucester's "Dost thou know me?" is less a confused query than an effort to construct a rational frame for their dialogue--an appeal to Lear to remember his own mimetic past and hence his own identity. But Lear has long since remembered his past, ages and all, flattery and folly. The Apothecary's proffered cure is merely mimetic bait to lure Lear back to the bombastic suffering of the sane. Lear becomes suspicious, smelling a possible flatterer, a trickster. He turns the mnemonic tables on Gloucester by seizing upon his eyes to remind him of his own past as a lecher, who squinted at women and now leers at Lear. "No, do thy worst, blind Cupid; I'll not love" (136). Lear suspects seduction and now repudiates the

bond with this womanizer which he earlier had sought to establish. Lear is now going to test his subject's loyalty, probing for a bond between them at a deeper level.

Lear's command, "Read thou this challenge; mark but the penning of it" (137), is a sudden gesture which completely alters the course of the dialogue in part because its content is unrelated to what precedes it and in part because it is a sudden, imposed invention rather than witty banter. It is critically tempting to presume that this challenge is directed against Lear's usurping, unnatural "sons," and that Gloucester--still the king's only subject--who proved an inadequate Apothecary despite or perhaps because of his very lechery, is now commanded to play the role of herald, transformed from an obscene Cupid provoking love to an unlikely messenger announcing war. But the question of who comprises the object of this challenge is not particularly significant because, I suggest, there is no challenge. There is a performative logic to this sudden move on the part of Lear if he has decided to "test" Gloucester, to see if his blindness is real, if there is anything under the blindfold. The more overt Lear's suspicions and the more evidently calculated the challenge, the more Gloucester's blindfold becomes like Tom's blanket--an object of metadramatic assault consistent with Lear's discursive aggression. Gloucester will be defeated in this context contest by being put on the "mimetic defensive." For he must repeatedly aver his blindness against Lear's

suspensions that he is only pretending to be blind which, metadramatically, is precisely the "case." Thus Lear's suspicions about the presence of Gloucester's eyes under the blindfold may actually begin at the opening of the present speech, with "I remember thine eyes well enough" (134), which metadramatically means, "I know they're under there." As with the Fool's voyeurism regarding Tom's blanket, Lear's desire to violate the mimetic illusion and expose a mere performer engenders in us the expectation of an eventual discovery and thus creates suspense. It also compels us visually now to focus upon Gloucester's eyes, which are both the visual referent and the subject matter for much of the ensuing dialogue, as Lear begins confronting the technical and philosophical problems of performing for a blind man. The word "eyes" occurs five times in the next fifteen lines (and three times thereafter), while "see" or "seen" occurs six times in the same passage, and there are additional references to sight. Lear has found his theme, Gloucester's blindness and "request" for illumination, around which he will create his next persona.

Gloucester insists upon his blindness: "Were all thy letters suns, I could not see" (138). This curious image highlights the pun on sun and serves as Edgar's cue to intervene with one of his (now) rare choric remarks. Assuming this moment in the play with its nonexistent letters and suspicious blindfolds to be a metadramatic interlude, let us

supply the text of the non-existent letter: sons are letters, that is, messages, to their fathers. Edgar is such a letter to his father, saying "I will save you" but meaning "I will kill you." And inasmuch as he himself delivers this message to Gloucester, he is the messenger/deathsmen as well. Only moments from now he will kill for a letter and will bear a message to Albany, the message of Albany's death. But whereas Edgar's message to him says, "I will kill you," it means "I will save you," for Edgar intervenes and switches victims--Edmund. Gloucester's son pun prompts Edgar's choric intrusion--the letter (which killeth) speaketh--which continues this business about non-existent documents: "I would not take this from report" (139). Edgar would not believe a story told about a mad king's feeble trick upon a blind old courtier. But he would believe a play, if he were in it. He will believe and pronounce real only what he can see--"it is"--which Lear with metadramatic insight knows is fake. Anyone with eyes can plainly see there is no document (only a son with a message for his father), but what of Gloucester: does he reach out in the darkness, groping for this "challenge?" Of course not, since he cannot see or read it anyway. Or does he not reach for it because he knows it is not there? Who is tricking whom? What is under Gloucester's blindfold? Whatever the outcome, only Edgar, sanely clear-sighted, is fooled.

If Lear's test is the choice between three caskets or

three daughters, the correct choice being Cordelia or death, then Gloucester's test is proportionately simplified, being a choice between two sons, one of which will kill and replace him. Gloucester's textual misprision early in the play caused him to fail the test in one sense, but to pass it in another. He chooses the right son to kill him but the wrong to succeed him (though it grants Edgar the opportunity to display "a provoking merit" in swindling the blessing after Edmund has done the dirty work). We recall how in 1.2 Gloucester demands Edmund's forged letter, dons his spectacles, reads the letter, and misinterprets it. He asks Edmund, "You know the character to be your brother's?" (60) and then answers his own question: "It is" (64). By character Gloucester implies not just handwriting and disposition of personality, but dramatic role as well, by which of course Gloucester confuses Edmund's role, the treacherous conspirator, with Edgar's, the blessed heir and optimistic but implacable guide to death: "Men must endure / Their going hence, even as their coming hither. / Ripeness is all. Come on" (5.2.9-11). And without further ado, Edgar takes his father, whose heart is ripe to bursting, off to bury him where he may rot properly. But these harvest images are far from Gloucester's mind as he reads the fake letter which itself repudiates the organic metaphor for that of mere exchange, bifurcating the murdering son by halving the inheritance which they would "enjoy . . . for ever," as though the

sons were immortal. Readily taking this from report, Gloucester proceeds next to misread the almanac (which, for a period performance reconstruction, would yield intriguing visual puns if represented by a copy of the Erra Pater, a popular almanac of the day). Squinting through his spectacles, Gloucester locates the prediction and confirms his error by misinterpreting the text, claiming of Edgar that "this villain of mine comes under the prediction; there's son against father" (1.2.106-07). In 3.3 Gloucester confides to Edmund and to us that he owns a letter which endangers his very life, a letter which we cannot see but which Edmund finds, steals, reveals to us, and redeems for the old man's earldom, conferred by Cornwall: "True or false, it hath made thee Earl of Gloucester" (3.5.16). Thus by the time that Lear challenges Gloucester to read his challenge, Gloucester has failed abominably at reading documents, yet he has learned that letters are deadly matters. As he could not see the cliff because it was not there and he had no eyes, he cannot see the letter because it is not there and he has no eyes. He cannot read the message of his death and once more "wants eyes," someone to read for him, someone like Edgar, an avid reader: "manners, blame us not: / To know our enemies' minds, we rip their hearts; / Their papers is more lawful. [Reads] / Let our reciprocal vows be remembered. / You have many opportunities to cut him off" (4.6.256-260).

Lear may emphasize the test motif by standing before

Gloucester with his arms folded or his hands on his hips, reinforcing visually for us that there is no text (and perhaps no script, if he is metadramatically challenging Gloucester's blindness). But with such mannerisms accompanying his command--"Read"--Lear might convey something of a grim but textless school master, marking the commencement of Lear's and Gloucester's teacher/pupil relationship out of which develops Lear's penultimate adoption of the mode of folly, the formal verse satirist. Gloucester responds to this command with another engaging pun: "What, with the case of eyes?" (142). Not only do empty sockets covered with a blindfold make a snug container for eyeballs, but there is a printing pun here as well, referring to the frame where a compositor kept letters (upper case and lower case), in this case, the letter "I." Gloucester's pun picks up on "letters" from his previous line and again reminds us that there is no text, and if there is no text, what need for eyes, or I's? Or what matter that there are hundreds of I's if they all end up in the same letter, that invisible message of death? All we can see plainly is that Gloucester's reply greatly pleases Lear.

Lear is now convinced of Gloucester's blindness. This could be indubitably established onstage if while exclaiming, "What! with the case of eyes?", Gloucester unveils, pulling off the blindfold to reveal his empty mutilated sockets (as if we expected to see the actor's eyes, as if this were

Gloucester's counter-joke; but there is another layer of mimetic illusion beneath the first, and how many more we do not know). It is yet another of those fine dramatic moments which shatters Edgar's proffered choric frame. Edgar's lament attempts as usual to summarize, to define the "worst" and so delimit it. But as usual the "reality" of the play immediately supercedes his pronouncement with yet another blow somehow crueler and beyond Edgar's "worst." Thus while Lear puckishly tries to dupe the blind old man, Edgar bemoans the spectacle, offering to guide the audience in responding. But as Lear "forgot" Tom's capacity for sudden self-representation, so Edgar and Lear forget Gloucester's. Edgar "places" us and the play at the bottom, the "worst." Yet Gloucester hurts us further, tearing off the bandage which actually gave us comfort, and forcing us now to look upon Gloucester's blindness. Tom reserved a blanket which he adamantly refused to shed, prompting the Fool's voyeuristic banter that revealed their mutual metadramatic awareness--the coded stage talk from one performer to another. If Tom refused to "present" total nakedness (though he spoke freely about that which remained concealed), Gloucester produces that shocking moment of stripping to reveal total blindness. The gesture of uncovering (Gloucester's equivalent to Lear's "unbuttoning") produces dramatic shock, exploding Edgar's attempt at closure, yet the emblem of the gored eyes shocks as well, for it is the visual equivalent of castration, these

bleeding sockets where once were "precious stones" (5.3.189) as Edgar, their new owner, calls them. Tom may not reveal the lurking phallus, but Gloucester may reveal its deprivation--its theft, with the father's blessing, by the loyal and natural son and phallic heir. The inherited phallus will go on to father a new generation of monsters from hell, while the castrated, discarded fathers gather to exchange their wisdom born (too late) of suffering, and to plot revenge. For what do discarded fathers do? They see how the world goes; they look with their ears; they behold as if anew images of Authority; and they render judgments incapable of altering the reality they observe. This is to say that they comprise an audience of discarded players, helpless while the play continues and waiting for their cue to exit.

At the moment when Gloucester uncases his brace of uncased eyes, we draw our breath in pain. Yet Lear exclaims, "O, ho!", loudly and manically, deeming the moment revealing, and making it amusing as though he might control our response, as though he were our hermeneutic guide. His response, "are you there with me?" (148), might be construed as "have you taken me `there'?", implying that the blind man has led the madman on a fool's errand by playing him a joke, both verbally and visually. Or "are you there with me?" might be rendered regally, as though Gloucester has (at last) arrived with Lear, arrived at some place of darkness and castration--for Gloucester is as impotent as Lear, as we can see from

this one's eyelessness and that one's nausea, and mutually light purses. Gloucester holds in one hand the bloody blindfold and in the other the empty purse given him earlier by Lear, which helps provide a striking visual referent for Lear's jokes about eyelessness and poverty, heavy cases and light purses. Lear has two objects to point to, the mutilated eyes and the hands clutching the rags of bags. With neither eyes nor money, Gloucester is entirely empty--robbed, spent, and discarded. But as Lear made of Tom a companionate victim of daughters, he makes of Gloucester a fellow fool, making light of Gloucester's darkness, performatively profiting from his poverty. As he attributed filial victimization to Tom, he attributes sight, and Lear's own use of it, to Gloucester the filial victim, who agrees, but with a certain reservation: "I see it feelingly" (147). Gloucester, still kneeling, heightens the word "feelingly" as he wrings the spent rags in his hands. If not now then surely later ("If thou wilt weep my fortunes, take my eyes" [174]), these rags become the very handkerchiefs of grief, integral to the further spectacle of the blind man weeping. For Gloucester does see how the world goes, not with Lear's satiric or satanic clarity, but with sorrow and pity. Thus the trickster stays full of scathing commentary; the victim has nothing to say but what he feels, said best in tears (like Cordelia's).

Only now is Lear shocked, now that Gloucester has ex-

pressed emotion. He had understood Gloucester's dramatic and metadramatic unveiling as its own mad gesture revealing Gloucester's parallel insights and perception of the world. He had heard a legal pun on "case," had seen in Gloucester's bleeding rings proof of the sons' crime against fathers, had found a new Philosopher. And so Lear, exuberant in their shared insight and in the discovery of evidence, punned jubilantly on "case," on the case or example of blindness and penury, the theft of eyes and money, phallus and property. Thus when Gloucester reveals not how he feels but that he feels, Lear in his turn is shocked: "What, art mad?" (148). Lear has long since passed from self-pity into the satiric mode, from the introverted victim to the extroverted judge, and cannot fathom a fellow father feeling disappointed or surprised by cruelty and abandonment. Lear sees now that he has been tricked. When Gloucester unveiled, Lear thought the act revealed insight, not deeper blindness. Instead, Gloucester wrings rags, appeals to his physical impotence, and offers the lame excuse of his physical handicap as a legitimate impediment to seeing the world as does Lear.

Lear brusquely rejects Gloucester's appeal to his sensory plight by teaching Gloucester the self-evident. Gloucester needs no eyes: "Look with thine ears" (149). Lear is calling attention here to one of Gloucester's more prominent performative gestures, his recurrent straining to hear clearly. Lear nearly makes sense, to interpret the madman without

the benefit--or disadvantage--of observing him as well. The same intensity of straining to hear which has focused Gloucester's concentration upon Lear's speech and has enabled him to reply in keen and feeling puns, this audient concentration is now turned against Gloucester who, Lear maintains, can hear the truth or else recall it if he can concentrate with such intensity. So Lear in full philosophical mode leans now toward Gloucester's ears, probing the only faculty which Gloucester will admit to having. Lear lends him sight by creating word-pictures, of "yond justice" and "yond simple thief" (150), re-enacting their fictive exchange by elongating his enunciation of "rails," with bluster and in a higher pitch. "Hark in thine ear: change places, and, handy-dandy, which is the justice, which is the thief?" (150-52). But this is the Folio text. In a splendid example of textual handy-dandy, the Folio has reversed the Q1 line: "which is the theefe, which is the Iustice?" Q1 is decidedly preferable here because it creates a simple rhetorical chiasmus which serves as a didactic illustration for Lear's dense but attentive student and provides an auricular assurance which is logically self-evident and independent of one's visual faculties. Lear turns to another example, reminding Gloucester of his memory: "Thou hast seen a farmer's dog bark at a beggar?" (152-53). This appeal to common experience is ironic since we have seen Lear see a beggar (Tom) bark at a king's dogs, but, handy-dandy, Lear nevertheless images

"Authority" in the dog exercising power over a man. We would like to think that Lear by continuing the handy-dandy process, by remaining in the mode of Erasmian folly, will effect a levelling of differences through the proliferation of inversions. Instead, Lear moves into the sermonic mode, not as Erasmian Folly but as an Ecclesiastes who condemns differentiation, preaching humility amid futility--but advocating revenge.

From the time he reprimands Gloucester ("What, art mad?"), Lear moves away from dialogue as he warms to his topic. As he unfolds his catalogue of examples of "how this world goes," his tone becomes declamatory, his function prophetic, his genre the sermon, copious with related encomia and specific illustrations. The sermonic passage culminates and concludes with repetition like that of a simplified Donne (and my lineation follows that of Anthony Hecht's poem "Rites and Passages"): "None does offend, / None, I say, / None" (165). All have sinned, yet none does offend. "Offend"¹² here, as elsewhere in the play, connotes to vex, annoy, or insult. If none does offend those in power, then power has no cause to punish; if greater sinners execute sentence upon lesser ones, then power has no moral right to punish. The speech is striking in its relative clarity, its formal declamation, its minimum of theatrical playfulness and maximum commitment to formal argument. Lear seems on the verge of a great insight, that he, ultimate "Authority" and King of

Fools, is a man more sinning than sinned against, and so can fabricate no cause and arrogate no right to punish others. Or perhaps he is on the verge of revealing to us that this has all along been his rationale for offering a universal pardon, for restoring the Golden Age.

This moment of potential self-implication provides the best opportunity for Lear to prove himself a penitent madman, like a medieval Nebuchadnezzar. But Lear frames the sermon in cynical satire which undermines any serious claim to Lear's moral enlightenment. Like the Malcontent, Lear implicates himself along with the rest of society, but without offering any real glimmer of penitence, much less any hope of grace. After all, in the very next moment Lear is bribing someone--"Take that of me, my friend" (167)--whether Edgar the deputy, or the executioner via Gloucester the condemned man. Despairing of reforming society by royal fiat, force, or example, Lear cynically exploits its corruption to prevent a further injustice to his subject and fellow father, plating Gloucester's sin with gold by tossing him a heavy purse. If he ransoms his servant, he saves him for further corruption: "Get thee glass eyes; / And, like a scurvy politician, seem / To see the things thou dost not" (168-70). Lear would have Gloucester resume the wearing of his spectacles (re-activating the reading motif associated with the blindman), not as formerly to be further fooled by appearances, but to fool others by means of appearances. Pretending legal expertise,

Gloucester would pretend to discover technicalities enabling him to avoid his accuser, to fabricate defensive evidence. Thus Lear follows his diatribe upon injustice with practical legal application, schooling his pupil not on how to obtain justice but on how to avoid victimization, the likely fate of the disenfranchised, of discarded fathers.

Lear's advice concludes the speech and is followed by more disjointed transition, at which occurs a textual crux. The Folio reads, "Now, now, now, now; / Pull off my boots; harder, harder; so" (169-70). The Quarto differs in the opening: "No now pull off my boots." Adopting the former, we would divide in two the phrase "now, now, now, now," making it a repetition of the consolatory expression, "now, now." Lear offers this gesture of comfort because Gloucester now is crying. Since the topic of Lear's next speech, specifically addressed to Gloucester, is weeping, we may infer that he by then is weeping. The question is, at what point does he begin to weep? From the moment that Lear's formal declamation ends (at "None does offend, none I say, none"), the king turns to his subject, offering a bribe and advice. Perhaps the mention of "glass eyes" reminds Gloucester that he stumbled when he saw. Lear blesses his kneeling grieving subject with the King's Touch, an empathic moment, and if Gloucester is seeking desperately for some means of showing his affection, perhaps attempting once more to kiss that hand, then Lear could compassionately offer Gloucester this

therapeutic act of service. The Q1 reading, "No now pull off my boots," allows a different performative situation. His "glass eyes" advice could convey a note of exasperation with his weepy student, resistant still to the teaching of the ironic malcontent. If Gloucester feebly fumbles for a hand to kiss, Lear could patiently or even petulantly give him something useful to do, taking off Lear's boots.

Again we see a poignant emblem which elicits a choral remark from Edgar. The blind old Earl, doing honorable service for the king, weeps. Lear apparently is fatigued as the rage briefly subsides and the agitated posturing gives way again to dialogue, or at least to a tamer and more personal mode of address. Edgar's lament, "O! matter and impertinency mix'd; / Reason in madness" (172-73), is poignant only because of the timing of the remark, and because poignancy is by now established as a convention of the side-piercing aside. For Edgar is clearly impressed by the substance in Lear's mad speech. He has been listening to mad language, no longer dismissing it as nothing, as a pretext for pathos. To Edgar Lear is now inspired, more prophet than fool or demoniac. But by now we expect ensuing events to undermine Edgar's evaluation. If Lear does so here, it is by speaking not with inspired frenzy but with sober intimacy, turning from satiric raillery to compassion, from preacher to comforter. This is Lear's first encounter with someone weeping on his behalf (Cordelia will do so twice more), and its

impact on this occasion is to bring Lear out of his declamatory mode into an intimate one. Gloucester for his part is supplicating Lear for an acknowledgement of their mutual wretchedness, for company in misery. Lear's response, his offer, is double-edged: "If thou wilt weep my fortunes, take my eyes" (174). If "if" is conditional, the statement means, "I will give you my eyes (restoring your sight) only if you use them to weep for me," a dubious blessing at best. Lear might continue the stern school master motif if the subtext reads, "very well, you weep, I'll think." But if "if" means "since," Lear's offer is to weep together. Lear has offered before to get rid of his eyes rather than to weep, so as to avoid humiliation. He would prefer Gloucester's blindness, unable to see his own shame. Similarly, Gloucester would exchange his affliction for Lear's madness--"so should my thoughts be severed from my griefs" (4.6.279). Each would prefer the other's punishment, which is to say, each is punished appropriately, from a moral perspective, or tortured exquisitely, from a dramatic.

And now as if to confound Edgar, Lear makes perfect sense in simple speech: "I know thee well enough; thy name is Gloucester" (175). Only now, after imposing upon Gloucester a vast didactic interlude--or is it a lunatic void?--which makes him confront his own blindness and his disenfranchised place in the world, only now does Lear suddenly answer Gloucester's question from line 132: "Dost thou know me?"

This answer demonstrates the startling acuity of Lear's memory (which implies the comprehensiveness of his case against ungrateful children) and the profundity with which Lear knows both Gloucester and his plight. Lear compassionately grants Gloucester recognition (which Caius/Kent is never to receive) and, to the extent humanly possible, assures Gloucester that he weeps not in vain, that Lear accepts the blind man's tears as tribute, but accepts them also as appropriate to Gloucester's own wretchedness. This is the moment most closely approaching sublimity, as Lear offers comfort--"Thou must be patient; we came crying hither" (176); but not without wit if, as I suspect, "crying" refers to "Gloucester," a pun on "glaister," Scots for "to weep." The malcontent satirist could be lurking beneath Lear's speech on weeping, given all the puns and Lear's forthcoming desire to preach, which signals a recurrence of mania. But the speech can also be delivered as straight pathos. If Lear offers the stock stoic poet's consolation about the fundamental grief of the human condition, we hardly mind the cliché since we value so rare an act of compassion. But this classical consolatory trope receives direct expression in a curious polyphonal manner. Gloucester initiates the trope, "Alack, alack the day!" and Lear completes it: "When we are born" (179-80). Whether Lear's retort is ironic or emphatic, the expression seems to call forth not only Ecclesiastes, but also the infant of Saguntum, as if Lear were calling for a return to the womb,

if it could be a fine and private place of annihilation and not of hellish torment. The counterpoint, of the two discarded fathers speaking as if in accord and even as if with one voice, sets up the climax to Lear's mad routine.

The culmination of Lear's mad scene, just prior to his apprehension by Cordelia's party, deserves quoting in full.

When we are born, we cry that we are come
To this great stage of fools. This' a good block!
It were a delicate stratagem to shoe
A troop of horse with felt; I'll put't in proof,
And when I have stol'n upon these son-in-laws,
Then, kill, kill, kill, kill, kill, kill! (180-85)

Traditionally the interpretive stumbling block is "This' a good block," which to resolve, we must reconstruct Lear's separation from Gloucester prior to preaching this final sermon. Lear's purpose in preaching is to distract Gloucester from his grief, whether Lear's motive be gentle compassion or manic playfulness. I suggest that Lear set the stage for the final act of his playlet by drawing up a joint stool which he places quite near the blind man, as if to insure that he understand Lear's staging and thus fully attend to the diversion. With Gloucester still kneeling, Lear upon mounting the "block" delivers his sermon to us all, a meta-dramatic pronouncement. But he remains or becomes aware of his own stage above the stage, and peering down from his prodigious height (visually echoing Edgar's mime at "cliff-side"), he contemplates the kneeling Gloucester. It occurs to Lear to mount him (echoing Gloucester's leap), which he does, becoming an apocalyptic horseman. The inspiration for

the "delicate stratagem" might come from the sight of Gloucester's "hooves" still clutching rags.

Even if such spectacle as father mounting father were gratuitous, it would not be necessarily anomalous in this play. This could actually be Lear's penultimate prank: the constructing of a "hobby horse," with Lear the head and Gloucester the tail. Formally, then, Lear punctures his status as formal verse satirist by reverting suddenly to the rustic Clown. But the emblem is quite functional as well in dramatizing a theme of great importance, the revenge of the fathers. It is as though the fathers will return and punish home only now, when they are in league, the madman, replete with eyes and money, leading the blind, whose case of eyes provides him evidence. Lear resumes his former shape not only through his restoration, effected by the return of the subject, but by being raised up, exalted upon the back of the discarded father reduced to a brute body which is appropriated by its royal head. Once more, Lear's kingdom (of mice, wrens, gilded flies, a forked animal) seems to rise, to well up from below, like the Mother, or like Mother Night and the Furies. This composite Father is not unlike the Ovidian mutants presumably spawned by Luxury running amok over a sexual battlefield, not unlike the Centaur who, possessed of fiends below and gods above, is the battleground of the old gods and the new demons. It is fitting that the battlecry of the avenging Father is answered immediately by the hunting

horns of the children's party. No doubt we too fear confronting this primal desire of the Father for revenge. We must bury the madness of the past in utter darkness. And thus he must be apprehended by the children, this castrated Centaur, this Father who will not die.

NOTES

1. Ralph Berry, Shakespeare and the Awareness of the Audience (New York: St. Martin's, 1985) 9.

2. Jan Kott, Shakespeare Our Contemporary (New York: Doubleday, 1966) 149.

3. Shalom J. Kahn, "Enter Lear Mad," Shakespeare Quarterly 8 (1957) 315ff.

4. Kathleen Basford, The Green Man (Ipswich: D.S. Brewer, 1978) 8.

5. Marvin Rosenberg, The Masks of "King Lear" (Berkeley: U of California P, 1972) 207-16.

6. Ruth Nevo, Tragic Form in Shakespeare (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1972) 24-26.

7. The Pilgrimage to Parnassus, in J.B. Leishman, ed., The Three Parnassus Plays (London: Ivor Nicholson and Watson, 1949) 129.

8. Rosenberg, 269-70.

9. Alvin Kernan, The Cankered Muse (New Haven: Yale UP, 1959) passim.

10. P.W. Thomson, "King Lear and the Actors," Aligarh Journal of English Studies 8 (1983) 176.

11. William Matchett, "Some Dramatic Techniques in King Lear," in Philip C. McGuire and David A. Samuelson, eds., Shakespeare: The Theatrical Dimension (New York: AMS, 1979) 185-208.

12. Cf. 1.1.304; 1.2.40; 2.4.193; 5.3.126.

CONCLUSION

If we learn anything from Gorboduc, from King Leir, from Cordelia's and Kent's interruptions of Lear's abdication ceremony, from the Fool's persistent refrains, then we learn that Lear is at the outset of the play a Fool. The question of Lear's spiritual, moral, or emotional "progress," such a recurrent issue in the criticism of the play, is largely over whether Lear eventually attains to wisdom, and if so what he learns. If he remains until death resolutely a Fool, as I suggest, the question might then be, does he become a "wise" or Christian Fool in a world of Fools? The kind lauded by Paul or condemned by Proverbs? My suggestion is that he attempts to assume the role of the serene and shriven "hermit," but is prevented from remaining such by a mimetic twist (Cordelia's death) which shows him finally to be a deluded wretch relentlessly punished for his condemnable folly.

Early in the play, Lear is confronted again and again with his folly and its fruits, both by the Fool's persistent chatter and by the painful consequences of his abdication, which he blames on ungrateful daughters. His banishment accomplished, Lear by the third act is left without a role to play and so commences experimenting with various personae, most of which we have examined: Vengeance (personal, royal,

or apocalyptic); the Stoic; the Martyr or Victim; the Penitent (as seen in the voice of conscience). It is Poor Tom whose appearance marks for Lear the opening of an alternative network of personae--madman, Fool, naked outcast, Philosopher--with which Lear begins experimenting. The critical commonplace, that the Fool leads Lear into a recognition of his own folly while Poor Tom leads Lear into the experience of madness, requires clarification. If the Fool leads Lear to a recognition of his own folly, he does not actually lead Lear to adopt either the persona (and hence performative mode) of the Fool nor the Erasmian philosophy of folly. Poor Tom does both. He leads Lear into adopting the various performative modes of both madness and folly, but in order for Lear to "have space" in which to act out these modes, both the Fool and Poor Tom must disappear and let Lear, ever royally acquisitive, have all the Fool to himself. And through the sight of Poor Tom's naked body Lear is inspired to perceive the philosophy of folly. But this inspiration to unbutton proves merely a rhetorical rationale for his nakedness, which itself becomes subsumed to Lear's warped strategy for resuming his "shape" and gaining his revenge. But this is to anticipate. By embracing his Philosopher, Lear gains the means by which to assume the modes of performed madness.

Unlike Poor Tom, the Fool cannot introduce to Lear this alternative repertoire of personae with which Lear will

compose his new "shape." One reason is simply that the Fool also wants all the Fool to himself and thus, both as actor and as character, jealously guards his own role: "I would not be thee, Nuncle . . . I am better than thou art now: I am a Fool; thou art nothing" (1.4.182-191). Yet the Fool could not lead Lear where the latter must go, even if he so desired. We have above briefly touched upon the Fool's preoccupation with "the night," which commences with the lament in 3.2 ("here's a night pities neither wise men nor Fools," (3.2.12-13) and his later complaint ("This is a brave night to cool a courtezán," 3.2.79), and continues in the references in 3.4 already discussed. The Fool's obsession with the night is firmly grounded in a pragmatic aversion to physical duress, but also in a primitive fear, as evidenced in his comically superstitious initial reaction to Poor Tom, that nocturnal denizen. Far from being one to lead Lear through the dark night ahead, the Fool is all for returning, and is so pathetic in his endurance of the storm that Lear becomes solicitous in sheltering him; it is entirely likely that the Fool is the poor naked wretch who inspires Lear's prayer, evokes his royal guilt at taking too little care of his dependents, and awakens the worm of conscience. Particularly in the tidied-up Folio (which eliminates some of the Fool's more barbed satire), the Fool remains Erasmian, sorry for insulting his Sovereign pupil and whimpering to reenter the Court as a penitent flatterer: "O Nuncle, court holy-

water in a dry house is better than this rain-water out o'door. Good Nuncle, in, ask thy daughters blessing" (3.2.10-12).

The Fool desires to return, but Lear we know cannot. Poor Tom will indeed lead Lear through that night from which the Fool and Lear himself recoil:

In such a night as this? O Regan, Goneril!
Your old kind father, whose frank heart gave all--
O! that way madness lies; let me shun that;
No more of that (3.4.19-22).

The "way madness lies" is not only along the lines of thought about filial ingratitude, but seems bound up as well in the image of night, with its obliterating of all relations, its breaking of all bonds. What attracts Lear immediately to Poor Tom is his nakedness, with its surprising yet apparent capacity for enabling one to survive the night. Particularly if Tom seems unaware of his mortified arms (the most probable scenario), he seems the opposite of the Fool, impervious to pain and exposure, "outfac[ing] the winds and persecutions of the skies." It is itself something of a heroic stoic stance. Furthermore, such an "unaccommodated man" is beholden neither to other people nor even to animals, and by "unbuttoning" Lear may perceive an absolution of guilt in drinking Pomp's physic to the dregs. By stripping his own back, Lear may later rail like the satirist/prophet at all people in authority who audaciously punish sinners lesser than they.

Poor Tom as the "thing itself" allays many of Lear's fears of madness, perhaps primarily by communicating to Lear

the truth which Edgar observes in his first "backstage" rehearsal of Poor Tom: "Poor Turlygod! poor Tom! / That's something yet; Edgar I nothing am" (2.3.20-21). To be a madman presents Lear not just "something" to be, but the thing itself, a thing to be imbued, by Lear, with philosophical significance. Lear grasps part of the potential in the role which Poor Tom never fully exploits--the ennobling wretchedness of the Holy Hermit, an important variant of the Wild Man in the Woods motif. Lear's association with this generic convention of the representation of madness may contribute to the tendency of the critic to attribute to Lear the eventual acquisition of wisdom. Yet Lear never becomes serene consoled by the philosophy of suffering. Instead he clearly retains the violence and rage of madness which Tom also displays, only his is vengeful violence. He sees in Tom an imperviousness to pain, an indestructibility which might prove a useful step toward resuming his former shape. Lear hedges his bets by pursuing "wisdom" until he is better able to pursue revenge.

By introducing to Lear his own embracing ("thou unsubstantial air that I embrace") of nakedness and exposure, Poor Tom enables Lear to separate himself from the Fool. Lear subsequently creates his own costume in accord with his new role, his own version of presented nakedness and mortification. The nakedness and the wounding or self-abuse belong to the domain of madness. However, Lear rejects a number of

attributes of madness as presented by Poor Tom. The most repellent element of madness is its fearful proximity to death, hell, and the demonic. In 3.6 he tries to appropriate the vocabulary of hell for his own vengeful agenda: "To have a thousand with red burning spits / Come hissing in upon 'em" (3.6.15-16). Yet he is terrified when his hallucinations turn threatening, and is fortunate to have Tom nearby to chase away the hounds of hell. Only briefly in 4.6 does Lear once more approach the infernal place and, standing on the verge of the sulphurous pit, he vomits (Gloucester, on the other hand, leaps). This example illustrates another component of Poor Tom's madness which Lear does not adopt, his rank phallicism. Lear may wax bawdy, like the Fool, but as we have seen, as his risqué routine gains momentum Lear becomes violently ill, betraying his fundamental modesty.

I have posited in the preceding chapter that Lear's composed role for 4.6 might well be called the King of Fools, less in the festive sense of the sottie than in the more inclusive one of a Sovereign who freely traverses even into its darkest regions the spectrum of folly, that realm from buffoon to mythical prankster, scapegoat to clairvoyant, rebel to festive figure--that whole domain which Enid¹ Welsford impeccably maps out. Lear desires the solo his-trionic dominance which the Fool and Poor Tom both are capable of generating. The performative qualities he seems most to value in Tom are his capacities to produce spectacle,

to give expression to extremities of rage and suffering, and to shock his audience, dominating by defamiliarization or by blustering intimidation. What he seems to value most from the Fool are the abilities to employ wit (solo or in dialogue), to articulate a philosophy (not that of the Erasmian but of the railing malcontent), and above all to enjoy a privileged relationship with his audiences onstage and off, permitting him to engage and dominate us with far greater virtuosity than that available to the madman. Normally madness constrains performance by stipulating modes of enactment outside of which is naught but gibberish. Yet it confers a pragmatic liberation from the accountability in word and deed enforced by the sane upon the sane. As Edgar may have chosen the disguise of Poor Tom in part to be granted lenience if apprehended, Lear may also, like many a Bedlam beggar, seek protection in madness. After all, he is surely aware both of his enemies and of the danger to him in being captured: "Use me well; / You shall have ransom" (4.6.189-190). But Lear may also be seeking performative indulgence as well--from us. We noticed how terribly awkward as a performer Gloucester became in his fire-new zeal after the "miracle" at Dover Cliff, woodenly personating Affliction and Poor Tom. He is much better off performatively as the wise sufferer, wise enough to remain serenely silent, a serene but heavy burden for his son to lug about. By virtue of his madness Lear need not bother attempting clever songs and rhymes, may be excused

for barely funny routines, may freely digress from the burden of being amusing. He is free to be as disjointed as Poor Tom or a sputtering Kinsayderian satirist, thus exchanging the Fool's relatively benign barbs for public vitriol more in keeping with his tendencies to invoke curses. Lear could never become the King of Fools without following the way that madness lies.

If after awaking in Cordelia's custody Lear never fully resumes performatively his persona of the King of Fools, he never fully abandons it either, and in any case retains his folly in some significant fashion or other until he dies. It is most subdued, as is Lear himself, in 4.7 when he awakens to music, which symbolically helps restore harmony to his "untuned and jarring senses" (4.7.16). But more important than the music is the magic kiss of Queen Cordelia: "Restoration hang thy medicine on my lips" (26-27). There is, of course, the hideous pun on "hang," which means also "strangle" and so becomes grimly prophetic. More important to the immediate dramatic context is the term, "restoration." With her fairy tale kiss Cordelia does indeed bring about Lear's restoration as King, and she restores him as well to the mimetic action of the play, in which he awakes immersed. Lear wakes weeping. Weeping is the sign of a return both to mimesis and to the audience response appropriate to a resumption of mimesis--we too are invited now to weep in response to the elaborate pathos of the scene (where before we have been "prohibited" by the constant use of comic modes).²

Lear wakes weeping, assuming that he is in hell, and that the spirit of Cordelia is visiting him precisely to fill him with remorse for his mistreatment of her when they lived. But Cordelia visits him to lead him back into life, and back into the life of the play. Lear is re-enthroned, back at the mimetic center of the stage. Though he will later ask Cordelia, "Have I caught thee?" (4.6.21), for the moment Cordelia has caught him, her men having drugged him to get him there, and awaking him likewise by musical and gestural enchantment as he sits there trapped, as though "bound upon a wheel of fire." In spite of his delirium, this is actually the clearest perception of the tortures of mimesis which he will have until play's end. He plies his new and silent onstage audience with questions about details of his mimetic situation, but, mysteriously re-embodied and restored, he confesses, "I know not what to say" (54). Only the most diffident of stage clowns would ever make such a statement, but Lear, bound upon the throne and forcibly restored, no longer has improvisatory freedom. He is an actor waking in the middle of the play, uncertain of even his role, much less of his lines. Cordelia comes to his rescue performatively as well as mimetically, telling him what to do: "O! look upon me, Sir, / And hold your hand in benediction o'er me" (57-58). She draws his gaze away from its theatrically indecorous self-fascination, "directing" him to provide the culminating touch to the reunion and so fully

exploit its latent pathos. But Lear now spoils Cordelia's play, as she earlier spoiled his, by never fully accepting her love in the scene: "If you have poison for me, I will drink it. / I know you do not love me" (72-73). Although he has the excuse of a sovereign shame which renders him incapable of accepting her proffered love, the moment proves yet another of those missed opportunities in which a comforting love might have been displayed and mimesis truly re-routed.

Cordelia proves the factitious bait, the ignis fatuus, that lures Lear back into the mimesis of the play and leads him onward through the rest of its torments. She literally leads him across the stage to the battle, according to the Quarto stage direction to 5.2: "Enter the powers of France over the stage, Cordelia with her father in her hand." He needs such a guide, because as a self-admitted Fool, his grasp upon and involvement in the mimesis of the play is marginal. "I am a very foolish fond old man" (60), he admits, and again, "I am old and foolish" (85), his reason for each admission being to plead for lenient treatment on the grounds of imbecility. Lear's relation to Cordelia may now be rather like that of the Fool with Cordelia before her exile, during which he "much pined away" (1.4.72). Lear has already withdrawn into her kind nursery, and childlike trusts her to lead him now. Cordelia has harrowed hell to rescue him and to absolve him of his sins. He assumes that paradise must follow.

Part of the pathos of 4.7 is precisely that Lear seems not fully to understand the sublime grace she offers him, marring their reunion with a perhaps ennobling shame but also with moments of frantic selfishness. Part of the pathos of 5.3 is that Cordelia dies for a hopelessly naive Fool. David Pirie puts it well: "Critics who are unduly concerned with Lear take little notice of Cordelia's attempts to win back his throne. They might at least observe that her defeat in battle ensures that she, and her father, will be killed."³ Our concern for Cordelia's life has been aroused since 4.7 with its foreshadowing of her imminent death: from her own remarks ("My life will be too short" and "Restoration hang thy medicine on my lips") and from Lear's misprision of her as "a spirit," whom he asks, "Where did you die?" Edmund has revealed to us in his soliloquy at the end of 5.1 that he intends to kill them both. Pirie emphasizes that Cordelia also knows that she is to die, and that we know that she knows, which renders her final speech all the more nobly tragic: "Cordelia herself explicitly fears 'the worst' as they are being led off to prison. Perhaps her anticipation that they will be killed is what nerves her to want a final confrontation in which to denounce her sisters."⁴ We have always associated Cordelia's word with the truth, so that her "worst" is absolute, not the perpetually illusory affair of Edgar's "worst" continually giving way before a new depth of horror. And Cordelia knows why and for whom she is to die:

"For thee, oppressed King, I am cast down" (5.3.5). Lear, unfortunately, is absolutely ignorant of their (especially her) dire peril. Pirie remarks: "This plucky suggestion [to denounce her sisters] is Cordelia's last statement in the play . . . [Lear's] appallingly insensitive response to his daughter's question reduces her to tears."⁵ To paraphrase Pirie, whereas Lear considers the question of "who's in, who's out" a matter for gossip, Cordelia is willing to die over the issue, and does. Her tears are not necessarily for the apparent pointlessness of her own death, but may be compassionate, for she knows that Lear in his tragic naivety is soon to incur "the worst" himself. She knows that whether or not he is to die, contrary to his beatific vision of their future, they will be forever separated, not united. He will no longer be able to cling to her, unless to her dead body.

It would be easy to succumb to Pirie's condemnatory tone toward Lear and his resolute folly. Pirie, in privileging the political tragedy which comprises the action of the play, finds Lear irrelevant to the plot, and even an impediment to it. But in the context of the present argument, the role of Fool which Lear has chosen for himself ultimately precludes his holding a tragic perspective. Once "the great rage . . . is killed in him" (4.7.78-79), Lear loses the energy and the vitriol of the satiric railler, his folly modulating into a form even milder than that of his now vanished Erasmian Fool, into something approximating that of the shriven Christian

Fool, the purified hermit already enjoying bliss. Thus Lear may be less "appallingly insensitive" to Cordelia's speech than oblivious to it, lost in serenity or senility. It is easy to think of Lear's chatter about the two birds in a cage as analogous to the Fool's yearning to retreat from the storm, his suggestion that they return to the daughters and submit to their rule. His description of the Fools' Paradise he and Cordelia will enjoy in prison is a list strung together childishly with "ands," a speech we might easily deem regressive or infantile. Yet we cannot attribute Lear's misprision of the gravity of their predicament to ignorance about the mimetic situation, for he recognizes most of its salient details. He simply assumes that they will be locked away rather than killed. To explain Lear's misperception, Pirie like many critics either attributes it to a motive (usually selfishness) which skews his comprehension, or to the exhaustion of Lear's cognitive faculties (e.g., senility) induced by his extensive suffering. But we are in a position to offer an alternative suggestion, namely that Lear misconstrues his and Cordelia's danger because he thinks himself to be in a comedy, not a tragedy. Adopting a particular role involves assigning a genre to the events with which one interacts. Lear, now a benign Fool, assumes events ultimately to harmonize with his own role.

Lear has become his own Fool in the first place largely by default. As the Fool points out, Lear gives away his

other roles: "All thy other titles thou hast given away; that ["Fool"] thou wast born with with" (1.4.146-47). We have examined his experimentation with various personae and have seen how he "returns" to the mimesis of the play as the King of Fools, the role which permits him maximum histrionic dominance largely independent of a supporting cast (the kingdom which he "cast" away). He commences as a stage clown, to whom the mimesis of the play is irrelevant, though presumably comic. As Lear addresses Gloucester and the "case of eyes"--the evidence of vicious cruelty against fathers--Lear waxes acerbic as the formal satirist, the railing malcontent. At this point, the play to which he stands in relation is more problematic. For a railing malcontent satirist might find himself, though almost always at the periphery, in a comedy (a Satiromastix or a Volpone), a tragedy (Timon of Athens, Antonio and Mellida, The Revenger's Tragedy), or a tragicomedy (The Malcontent). We would not mistake King Lear for a comedy, yet we may have difficulty by 4.6 in determining whether it is tragicomedy or satiric tragedy, that is, whether it will end relatively benignly or in nihilistic catastrophe. Walter Cohen conveniently divides the play generically by calling the first three acts and 5.3 satiric tragedy, and 4.1 through 5.2 tragicomedy.⁶ Certainly the fourth act marks a tragicomic upturn in the plot, tracing the reunion of Gloucester and Edgar, the moral awakening of Albany, the return of Cordelia, the growing friction between the Machiavels, and Edgar's protection of his father.

But as Lear's raillery in 4.6 becomes more heated, more elaborate, he becomes committed to a role in a satiric tragedy. Although his remark about "this great stage of fools" is in itself more philosophically Erasmian, Lear's inspiration for the "delicate strategem" places him squarely in the theatrically-contemporary convention of the satirist-avenger-intriguer, that hybrid of the railer against a corrupt society who, motivated by personal injury, succeeds in both exposing the fallen society to which he belongs and contriving to purge the state of corruption. Lear has returned to the figure he presented early in his 4.6 routine, the general attacking a giant, only this time he has added the role of satirist to the figure, thereby clarifying his target and justifying his assault. The Clown and the Satirist both seek the same end: revenge. As we saw, at the very moment of his inspired strategem he is apprehended by the children's forces. The role of avenger-intriguer is denied Lear, being reserved as it is for Edgar; Lear we recall is castrated, Edgar armed with full phallic power. Lear is thus consigned to the role of impotent satirist and is once again in search of a more satisfactory role, of another variant of folly to adopt.

But when captured, Lear is convinced he remains involved in a satiric tragedy, for he knows his fate: "I will die bravely" (4.6.195). After sprinting offstage with Cordelia's men in pursuit, he is presumably, on a mimetic level, cap-

tured and forcibly drugged. Lear is no doubt convinced he is being put to death, since he awakes believing himself to be in hell. Instead, he has been rescued. But throughout the scene he continues fearing the worst from Cordelia: "Do not abuse me" (4.7.77). His rescue becomes for him a reality only in 5.2 as Cordelia leads Lear by the hand to do battle on his behalf. As 5.3 opens, the genre of the play hangs in the balance. If Lear, Cordelia, and Gloucester live, the play becomes an extravagant tragicomedy; if they die, it is a tragedy, satiric not because there is a prominent satirist present, but because the resolution has a strong element of gratuitous and nihilistic cruelty about it. Lear and Cordelia, one laughing, one weeping, present two radically different predictions of the genre of the play, only one of which can be correct. Then they both leave the stage.

We do not know the genre of the play until Lear enters with Cordelia's body in his arms, and even then we do not know it with certainty. Since hanging in Jacobean times did not break the victim's neck but killed by strangling, people did occasionally revive from hangings, if they were cut down in time.⁷ Desdemona, of course, revives temporarily in order to bid us a final farewell. Cordelia's revival is a real if slim possibility.

Lear enters carrying Cordelia and issues yet another unobeyed command: "Howl, howl, howl, howl" (256; Q1), two sets of "howls," the second pair more frenzied and commandeering

than the first. He is addressing us; or at any rate, both we and the other figures onstage become for Lear a larger undifferentiated audience. Again Lear demands a specified response from us, but "O!" we will not give it. The reason: "you are men of stones." We have reverted to the stones whence we came, when Lear first levied us to join him in conspiring against the cruelty of the play. "Had I your tongues and eyes, I'd use them so / That heaven's vault should crack" (257-58). Why are we not weeping and moaning, that is, howling? Lear suspects that we do not believe him, that we think him deluded as to the reality of the mimetic situation, or else that we trust him still as our flexible fool, one who with such ready access as he to the realms of metadrama ought to be able to fabricate a satisfactory solution. Thus Lear insists on the mimetic reliability of his witness: "I know when one is dead and when one lives" (259). Yet his decision to attempt to revive Cordelia rests upon a fundamentally metadramatic premise, namely that Cordelia is merely "acting" dead, and that Lear might catch the actor/actress ("Have I caught thee?") breathing and hence compel her to revive. While Lear seeks to exploit this metadramatic option (as well as the melodramatic one, the convention of last-minute rescues and resuscitations), his activities intensify the shock of the spectacle the pair present. For Lear once more repeats his testing of Cordelia, beseeching her for the correct answer; yet once more Cordelia says "nothing."

Commencing his final test of Cordelia, Lear may address "Lend me a looking-glass" (260) to the corpse of Goneril, Vanity the Puppet who may have regularly carried the distinguishing hand-prop of a small mirror which Lear borrows for his purpose. Or perhaps the "stone" he uses is yet another of the ubiquitous idle pebbles littering the stage, if my suggestion in the preceding chapter is correct. We stones in the audience might yet prove useful to Lear in his metadramatic attempts to "save" Cordelia. The next phase of the test is somewhat more difficult to reconstruct. What we know of the "feather test" from the text is minimal: "This feather stirs; she lives!" (264). Perhaps the feather comes from Cordelia's plumed helmet, part of Lear's general scavenging of the bodies of his daughters which in its own way contributes to the recapitulation of the opening-scene test, and which certainly intensifies the pathos as the dying old man surveys his destroyed family in their tragic reunion. I suggest that Lear might actually use the feather to tickle Cordelia, which becomes a real test for the actor/actress who must strive to remain in character (i.e., dead) and whom we like Lear intently gaze upon for a sign even of metadramatic life, which we too will gladly accept as mimetic truth, as we wished also to do at "Dover Cliff." If the actor "fails" this test, we all will "hold him to it" and force him to revive. Again we conspire with Lear to alter the play, to commandeer its genre. Such a metadramatic attempt on Lear's

(and our) part constitutes sheer Folly, the Fool's miracle which we all desire.

Kent intrudes upon Lear's attempt to fabricate a miracle, spoiling it irrevocably (and perhaps providing a distraction which permits the tested actor relief to breathe): "A plague upon you, murderers, traitors all! / I might have saved her; now she's gone for ever!" (268-69). Kent has ruined Lear's potential metadramatic miracle (spoiling his play) by attempting to impose the genuine mimetic comfort of his reunion with his master. Since Kent has spoiled the attempt at gaining visual evidence of Cordelia's recovery, Lear seeks auricular assurance: "Ha! What is't thou say'st?" (270-71). We of course know Cordelia's reply: nothing. And if now we are ready to give up on the miracle and be reconciled to Cordelia's death, Lear adds: "I killed the slave that was a-hanging thee" (273). This tells us that Lear did indeed cut her down, perhaps exacerbating our hope that he may have done so in time.

Kent proffers himself to Lear as a mirror: "If Fortune brag of two she loved and hated, / One of them we behold" (279-80). Lear and Kent form a mirror tableau, gazing at one another. Whereas before if we wanted to see the image of a human, our own image, we were to gaze into a stone. Kent offers a poignant line and tableau which could produce closure and could rescue meaning from the catastrophe. He offers Lear the image of the human bond which endures suffer-

ing, but Lear never sees it. His "dull sight" never sees the link between Kent and Caius. There is, for Lear, no "discovery" of Kent, only a "return" of Kent and thus the distant recollection of another whom Lear has wronged. His "I'll see that straight" (286) averts eye contact, darts away from the mirror. His "You are welcome hither" (288) is grim, given the hither Lear has to offer. Lear is reduced to silence, alone with guilt and ruin. Mimesis triumphs, its consolations robbed by the very efforts of folly to avert disaster.

Lear rouses himself for his swansong, the staging of which is once again difficult to reconstruct. Albany interrupts his attempt at providing such comforts as formal closure may supply: "O! see, see!" (303). Evidently Lear is frantic once more, grasping again Cordelia's body. His agonizing death speech commences with the exclamation, "And my poor fool is hang'd!" (304). Since subsiding into passivity some 15 lines earlier, apparently Lear has been meditating upon folly--his own, his Fool's, Cordelia's. His exclamation displays an apparent network in his mind, of folly, love, bonds, happy endings. All such coherence is gone because of an act of seemingly gratuitous cruelty.

Q1 horrifies with its painful death sequence. It gives Lear after his final unbuttoning two lines, "O,o,o,o" and "Break, heart, I prithee break." In this version Lear gives his treacherous audience more of the horrors of death than he presumes that we wanted. F1 contains Lear's dying vision of Cordelia's lips:

"Do you see this? Look on her, look, her lips, look there, look there!" (309-10). It may be that Cordelia's mouth has fallen open in an "O," offering not breath but a vacuum--the abyss.⁸ Nothing comes from nothing, and for the third time Cordelia says nothing. In the first act it was the word, "nothing." Earlier in this scene she refused to open her mouth at all; now she finally does, and says nothing. The Cordelia-actor has waited until the very moment that Lear is irrevocably committed to mimetic death, and then drops open his mouth. Perhaps the dying Lear suspects a trick, that he has proven a real Fool to be tricked into dying by the young, who do not want old people after all. Trick or miracle, Lear publicizes it, appealing with his last breath for a mitigation of the tragedy. Cordelia's mouth is the final evidence Lear cites in his attempt to bargain with us over the genre of the play. Kent interprets Lear's folly which in seeking to circumvent tragedy merely prolongs and intensifies it: "He but usurp'd his life" (316). Lear and Cordelia are carried offstage holding their breaths so as to look dead, but they return in a moment to our applause, our admiration that players could so hurt us with a fiction. They dance. We clap along. Players and audience collaborate now to produce a happy ending--now, outside the play, but inside the theater.

NOTES

1. Enid Welsford, The Fool (London: Faber and Faber, 1935).

2. See Susan Snyder, The Comic Matrix of Shakespeare's Tragedies (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1979). Snyder would argue that the counterforce to tragedy and pathos is due to larger comic plot structures. I have been focusing more on specific forms of comic enactment.

3. David Pirie, "Lear as King," in Shakespeare's Wide and Universal Stage, ed. C.B. Cox and D.J. Palmer (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1984): 211.

4. Pirie 212.

5. Pirie 212.

6. Walter Cohen, Drama of a Nation: Public Theater in Renaissance England and Spain (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1985): 342ff.

7. See Daniel P. Mannix, The History of Torture (New York: Dell, 1964): 109ff.

8. For a treatment of the network of imagery of O's, open mouths, and abysses in the context of "nothingness," see David Willbern, "Shakespeare's 'Nothing,'" in Representing Shakespeare, ed. Murray Schwartz (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1980): 244-63.

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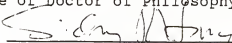
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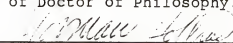
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